

Beneš
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by *Eduard Beneš*

MY WAR MEMOIRS

"There are many who hold that Professor Masaryk, the philosopher-historian, and Dr. Beneš, the farmer's son turned student, have shown more constructive statesmanship than any other figures in the political life of the last two decades."—*Spectator*

of similar interest

by *Thomas Garrigue Masaryk*

THE MAKING OF A STATE
MODERN MAN AND RELIGION
THE IDEALS OF HUMANITY *and*
HOW TO WORK
THE SPIRIT OF RUSSIA



EDUARD BENEŠ

Beneš
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

BY
GODFREY LIAS

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CHAPTER ONE

Conception of a State

THE MOST potent thing on this old earth's surface is the soil. It feeds us, clothes us, shelters us, and finally enfolds our outworn bodies when the thinking part of us seeks new pastures. In return many of us shamefully maltreat it, tearing the heart out of it with mechanical efficiency in a desperate desire for quick riches, building monstrosities upon its fairest places. But there are still very many who love it too dearly to misuse it. They husband its resources so that it remains fertile through thousands of years instead of being reduced to sterility in a few short decades like some of the newer lands. They understand it, they belong to it—but, unhappily, it does not always belong to them.

Throughout Central Europe you will find soil that is loved and cherished more thoughtfully than husband loves and cherishes his wife. Travel across the fertile and infertile acres and you will find race after race which, to misquote Lincoln, lives by the soil, of the soil, and for the soil. It takes out crops and puts back manure, sows, reaps, watches its charge day in, day out, for a whole lifetime—generally for the benefit of other people.

In this huge area—one of the oldest, agriculturally speaking, in the world—the German slogan, *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*,¹ holds good for a dozen different races

¹ One race, one State, one Leader.

besides the German, and the peasant is not only husbandman to the land, but wedded to it by ties more inexorable than those of any human marriage ceremony. Hence in largest measure the wars that have swept up and down the Danube since before the beginning of history. Even the religious wars of past centuries, and even the racial antagonisms which are rampant there to-day, have as background an unformulated urge to add field to field and enjoy more of the fruits of the earth.

Past conquests and the peaceful penetrations that follow the flag have left the soil of Central Europe subdivided among a bewildering patchwork of passionately race-conscious communities. For the most part these racial molecules mingle without coalescing though they have been near neighbours in some cases for over a thousand years. Every so often one of them grows militant and tries to destroy, oust, or absorb others. Sometimes it succeeds. But more often it fails.

To-day, as many times before, this age-old struggle for mastery centres primarily around what for twenty pregnant years was called Czechoslovakia. The principal scene is laid in the fertile undulations of Bohemia, the land which Bismarck once called "the navel of Europe", and rightly, because it is the geographical centre of the continent as well as the focal point from which the chief branches of the Teutonic and Slavonic races radiate—where, too, so many of their fiercest battles have been fought out. Neither Bismarck nor anybody else in his day could have dreamed of applying his famous phrase to Czechoslovakia, though it fits most admirably; for Czechoslovakia had not been thought of then. Czecho-

slovakia is a composite idea which was born in the heart of two great men and of a small group around them during the throes of the World War. But its earliest conception dates back to Thomas Masaryk's childhood and was fostered during the years of his professorship in Prague before the disruption of the Habsburg Empire. It was, as we shall see, a natural development from the complex racial antagonisms of the Danube. But had it not been for Thomas Masaryk and Eduard Benčš, it is doubtful whether we should ever have seen that compound word, Czechoslovakia, written across the navel of Europe. The word has gone again now—crossed off the map by the whim of one man to whom nothing appears sacred except the claim of the German to a *Lebensraum* or "living space" which disregards utterly the rights of other races. But it will be extremely surprising if the word "Czechoslovakia" does not come back again, and before very many months are past.

The western province of Czechoslovakia was Bohemia, and the immemorial frontiers of Bohemia on the Austrian and German sides are the watersheds of the three long ranges of the Böhmerwald, the Erzgebirge, and the Riesengebirge. At their highest these mountains do not much surpass four thousand feet, and it was inevitable that during the three centuries of Germanic domination which preceded the Great War there should have been infiltrations of land-hungry German-speaking folk anxious to establish themselves and their culture amid the subject Slavs. In some parts near the geographical frontier they succeeded almost to the tune of 100 per cent. But the local population was not easy either to dislodge or

to assimilate. When the Czechs were overwhelmed at the battle of the White Mountain in 1620, they had held Bohemia for at least eleven hundred years, and Slavs of one tribe or another had been there at least four hundred years earlier. They are still there and they are still as race-conscious as ever. At intervals the Slavs have been submerged under the intermittent flood of Germanism. On occasions they have even been overrun by Poles and Hungarians, and they once nearly succumbed to the Turks. But below these tides which ebbed and flowed across the soil of Bohemia, the sturdy undercurrent of the Czech peasantry steadfastly maintained its national individualism and character.

It was on May 28, 1884, at a time when the age-old struggle between Slav and Teuton was approaching one of these periodic crises that Eduard Beneš was born in a Czech peasant home at Kožlany, Bohemia.

Leaving Bohemia and the Czechs for a moment, let us turn south-eastwards to Slovakia, home of another branch of the great Slav race, the Slovaks, who arrived in their present homes about the same time as their cousins the Czechs arrived in theirs. In the seventh century, the Slovaks and the Czechs formed part of a great Slav empire under the semi-mythical hero Samo. But about one thousand years ago the Slovaks were subjugated by the Magyars. Except for two short intervals, the last of which occurred seven hundred years ago, they have been under Magyar rule ever since—up to the end of the Great War. Yet, although the Slovak nobility was either dispossessed or absorbed by the Magyar conqueror, all

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through this millennium of subjugation the peasantry retained their Slovak language and their Slav characteristics. The stirrings of independence surged through them now and again as when it roused them into open revolt against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848—a year in which all the nationalities of Central Europe were aflame, among them the Czechs, who also started an abortive rising against the domination of Vienna.

Two years later, while the rumblings of the 1848 upheaval were still echoing through Central Europe, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk was born, son of a Slovak peasant. Though Thomas Masaryk's father was a Slovak, and a serf at that, he did not (perhaps fortunately) live in Slovakia, but in Moravia, a province mainly peopled by Czechs. His duties made him somewhat of a wanderer on the face of the earth, and when Thomas was born his parents happened to be at the little town of Hodonin in the flat Moravian plain.

Moravia for centuries was administered as an integral part of Bohemia until it was made a separate crownland the year before Masaryk was born. From the beginning of history, right down the centuries, its soil was Tom Tiddler's ground for all three of the contending races in Central Europe, Slav, Teutonic, and Magyar. One wandering Germanic tribe after another settled there and then moved on, mostly westwards, but once (in the case of the Lombards) southwards to Italy. Then came the vast influx of Slavs who spread from the east right across what later became Czechoslovakia and surged on thence up to the heart of Germany. The Slavs drove

the Lombards out and made Moravia as well as Bohemia and Slovakia their permanent home.

Before long, the Moravians had to meet the onslaught of land-hungry Magyars, who had already overrun Hungary and Slovakia and were still unsated. Then the Germans came back, then the Magyars. Even the Poles sought to possess the land. All have left their mark on it in the shape of racial islands of easily identifiable peasants dotted among the Slav majority. The climax came at the end of the Thirty Years War when Moravia was so stricken that a law is said to have been enacted permitting a man to take two wives to "re-people the country". Shortly after the Thirty Years War, Moravia was incorporated in Silesia. Yet here, as in Bohemia, the German yoke never bit deep enough to destroy the Slav backbone of the peasant population. As the centuries went by, the Moravians gravitated more and more into the orbit of the Bohemian Czechs. Indeed in time most of the Moravian Slavs became identified with the Czechs.

Some of the inhabitants of Moravia, however, like the Masaryks, belonged and still belong to the Slovak branch of the great Slav family. They were, and are, a connecting link between two sets of cousins whom history had separated—as Germany and Austria were once separated. The recent reunion of Germany and Austria was the work of one man, Herr Adolf Hitler. The union of Czech and Slovak was the work of three: Professor T. G. Masaryk a Slovak, Dr. Eduard Beneš a Czech, and General M. R. Štefánik another Slovak. All of these men sprang from peasant families and each of them had his roots deep in the soil of the same vast river system, the Basin of the Danube.

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Beneš the Czech and Masaryk the Slovak were both university professors as well as sons of peasants. General Štefánik was an astronomer. Between them they made a new State when all the odds were against them. They made it out of two racial elements which were at least as distinct as English and Scot, though their languages differed less than Lowland Scottish does from southern English. The Czechs, as subjects of Austria, enjoyed a fairly liberal culture which while definitely assigning them a subordinate place in the State did nevertheless allow them considerable freedom of development. The Slovaks, as subjects of Hungary, were under constant pressure to de-nationalize and become Magyars. Their spoken tongue only evolved into a literary language during Masaryk's lifetime, and it did so in face of bitter opposition from the Magyars. Until less than fifty years ago Slovak patriots could only write in Czech. On the face of it this should not have been very difficult as can be seen by comparing the Czech and Slovak versions of the Lord's Prayer.¹ But any Burns lover will agree that it

¹ THE CZECH TEXT

Otče náš, jenž jsi na nebesích,
posvěť se jméno Tvé,
Přiď království Tvé, buď vůle
Tvá, jak v nebi tak i na zemi.
Chléb náš vezdejší dejž nám
dnes a
Odpusť nám naše viny, jakož i
my odpouštíme našim vinníkům,
Neuveď nás v pokušení, ale zbav
nás od všeho zlého.
Amen.

THE SLOVAK TEXT

Otče náš, ktorý si na nebesiach,
posväť sa meno Tvoje,
Príď k nám kráľovstvo Tvoje,
buď vôľa Tvoja svätá, ako v
nebi tak na zemi.
Chlieb náš vezdejší daj nám
dnes.
Odpusť nám viny naše, ako i
my odpúšťame vinníkom našim.
Neuveď nás v pokúšenie, ale
chráň nás od všetkého zlého.
Amen.

was a hardship, an indignity, and a grievance nevertheless to have been unable to write in the language in which one was accustomed to speak. Moreover, there is a difference in temperament between the two races which is naturally reflected in their two tongues. The Czech is sober realist; the Slovak an incurable romanticist. Masaryk, whose father was Slovak and mother Czech (he regarded himself as more Slovak than Czech), was acutely aware of the conflict within himself which he attributed to his racial dualism. "When I chose realism and scientific method," he told Karel Čapek, "I had to control my own romanticism and practise mental discipline." And he added, "I overcame the Slav anarchy in myself, in philosophy and other things, by the help of the teachers of the English-speaking world. Locke, Hume, and the other empiricists mitigated the teaching of Plato in me."

Masaryk was the architect of the new Czechoslovak State and Beneš was its builder. If Masaryk knew little about the professional side of architecting, Beneš knew quite a lot about at least one aspect of building. Among various side-lines into which Eduard Beneš's father poured the superabundant energy which refused to be exhausted by the drudgery of a nineteenth-century farm was a brick-kiln. Every member of the Beneš family had to make his or her quota of bricks and to do it laboriously by hand and without straw. We shall hear of this brick-kiln again. At one stage it played a not unimportant if incidental part in the upbringing of the future President. Had it not been for that brick-kiln, Eduard Beneš might conceivably have gone into the Church, as his elder brother once planned to do, in which case it is to be

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supposed that Eduard would not have fallen under the spell of President Masaryk.

This is not a book about Thomas Masaryk, but it is necessary to say something about him here if we are to understand Eduard Beneš. Without Masaryk, Eduard Beneš the State-builder would have been helpless. Similarly, Masaryk's grandiose architectural conceptions would have been still-born without Beneš. The two men were a necessary complement to one another. Throughout these pages their story weaves a single pattern, and that pattern is Czechoslovakia.

Thomas Masaryk was the son of a poverty-stricken coachman on an estate which later came into the hands of the imperial Habsburg family. His mother was at one time in service in a humble artificer's home in Vienna. Young Thomas has told his own story of his early life,¹ and it is one which gives no hint whatever of future world eminence. He had unusually few ambitions. Having shown aptitude at his lessons, he did what many another boy had done—drifted into schoolmastering. He loathed it, though he loved knowledge, especially geography. While he was waiting to become a teacher,² his mother took him to Vienna and apprenticed him to the locksmith in whose home she had been a servant. He loathed this, too. Soon he ran away home and found a job in a forge, where for the first time in his workaday life he was happy.

¹ *President Masaryk Tells His Story*, recounted by Karel Čapek. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

² He reached the requisite standard of admission to the Teachers Training School when he was fourteen, but the rules forbade him to enter till he was sixteen.

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But he was not allowed to graduate, so to speak, as a farrier, which was what he wanted to do. Instead, his parents somehow induced him to go back to the idea of teaching. This time he stuck to it. In due course he blossomed forth as a doctor of philosophy of the University of Vienna. Then he became a lecturer and married an American lady, Miss Charlotte Garrigue, whom he met at Leipzig. As so often, marriage proved the turning-point of his life. "It completed my education", is his own description. Five years later, in 1882, when the Charles University of Prague was divided into two parts, a Czech and a German, Masaryk was given a professorship in the Czech division. It was here that the seed of Czech independence which had long been lying semi-dormant within him really began to germinate. And it was here, twenty odd years later, that he came into contact with young Beneš.

In complete contrast to young Thomas Masaryk, young Eduard Beneš generally knew exactly what he wanted and, when he did know, planned meticulously till he got it. His father, Matej Beneš, was a man whose over-flowing ideas refused to be confined within his little farm. Not content with his original land, he sold it and bought a bigger and better piece. Finding even this too small either for his energies or his growing family—Eduard Beneš is the youngest of ten—he started a kind of general village store in conjunction with the farm. Then he bought that brick-kiln, using part of the output to enlarge the wooden house in which he lived. Every autumn he used to buy up large numbers of geese from his Czech neighbours and sell them in the German-speaking

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districts round Pilsen and Carlsbad, and even beyond the frontier of pre-war Austria in Germany itself.

This wanderlust is nothing unusual in Kožlany folk. The women, Eduard Beneš's sisters among them, used to go every summer to the hop-picking around Pilsen where the famous beer is brewed. But this was only twenty miles or so distant. Other Kožlany sons and daughters have wandered much farther afield. It is proverbial among them that no matter what part of the world you may go to, you will find someone from Kožlany has been there before you. Perhaps it is because Kožlany's soil is rather poor and a living hard to come by. Perhaps it is because Kožlany is on the edge of the zone where Czech has long met German in bitter economic rivalry. At any rate it is true that many sons of Kožlany have emigrated to England, to France, to the United States, to South America. A good many of them ultimately find their way home again to spend their money and their old age in or near their native place. That seems to be the chief reason why Kožlany is now a little town of about two thousand inhabitants.

But when Eduard Beneš was born there a little over half a century ago,¹ Kožlany was only a tiny hamlet. All around stretched undulating fields interspersed with stretches of woodland. Away to the west and north, but beyond the horizon, were the German-speaking districts around Pilsen (Czech: Plzen) and Carlsbad (Czech: Karlovy Vary) which are respectively twenty and forty miles from Kožlany. Both of them are essentially Czech towns in which Germans used to hold all the

¹ May 28, 1884.

plums, and both of them were well-known to the Beneš family.

Two of Eduard's brothers and sisters died when they were quite young. Of the remainder, one son, John, was not allowed by his father to follow tradition and leave Kožlany, so he took the law into his own hands and went off to the United States, where he still is. Frederick, the third boy, on the other hand, was a true son of his father, first taking on his father's farm after the old man had died, then adding to it and to the shop before selling both to buy a flour-mill in another part of the country. After the war, he sold the mill and the land around it in order to buy a much larger farm in South Bohemia. Frederick's thrifty ways stood the Beneš family in good stead during the war, for the flour from his mill tided them through the closing period when famine loomed perilously near. Eduard's wife lived at the mill for a while during those years when her husband slipped out of the country in order to help Masaryk organize the new Czechoslovak State from outside. But she spent a good many months in prison too because she was under suspicion for complicity in her husband's activities.

Eduard's father, like Frederick, preferred to add field to field and brick to brick rather than to spend money on luxuries. His farm was the usual peasant type—a square yard with a house for humans in one corner, a barn for animals in another, and a large manure heap in between with the farmland anything up to an hour's walk from the home. The sanitary arrangements consisted of a small shed conveniently alongside the manure heap. Water was pumped up from a well across the yard. The house itself

was originally all on one floor. Later an attic was added as well as (thanks to the brick-kiln) a room for the shop, the meagre profits of which made it possible for young Eduard to continue his studies in Prague when the local pedagogue had taught him all he could.

The one luxury the Beneš household allowed itself was reading. Its bookshelves contained a number of well-thumbed treasures, one of which was the Czech version of Old Moore's Almanac which in addition to weather predictions and much miscellaneous information about the world, was full of political allusions and gave glowing accounts of the old Czech heroes such as Good King Wenceslas of Christmas carol fame, John Hus, the disciple of our own John Wyclif, and John Žižka, the soldier who fought for Czech independence during the Hussite wars. Novels fanned the same patriotic (and anti-Austrian) flame, particularly those of Alois Jirásek, a contemporary of Thomas Masaryk, who was a great favourite among the younger members of the Beneš family.

Self-education of this kind was about all that Beneš Senior could afford for most of his children. He managed, however, to send his eldest son Wačlav (or as we should say "Wenceslas") to school in Prague, though the boy had to work in his spare time to keep himself. Afterwards Wenceslas married and settled down in Prague—in time to give board and lodging to his youngest brother Eduard, the only other member of the family whose education proceeded beyond the Three R stage during their adolescence.

The question of educating his numerous progeny

evidently worried Beneš Senior not a little. Once when he was saving all he could to buy the brick-kiln he went round to see the parish priest, hoping to get help to send young Wenceslas to complete his studies in Prague. The reply was brief and to the point: "If you want schooling you must have money." Beneš Senior said nothing, but like the elephant, he did not forget. Some years later, when the brick-kiln was in full blast, the priest came and asked old Beneš for the gift of some bricks to repair the parish church. "If you want bricks", said old Beneš with great inward satisfaction, "you must have money."

The Wenceslas contretemps marked the beginning of a rift between the Beneš family and the Roman Catholic Church. Up till then all the Benešes had been brought up as strict Catholics, and at one time there had been talk of making a priest of Wenceslas. Actually he went to the Roman Catholic Seminary at Prague for a while. But though the Beneš family retained their belief in God, they had little use for the Church of Rome. No doubt the parish priest was partly to blame, but only partly. History was the chief culprit. Hus, the father of the Czech independence movement which was so strong in all Czech peasants of the latter half of the nineteenth century, had fought against the universality doctrine of the Church of Rome in the fifteenth century. The Thirty Years War which left the Czech Protestants and nation crushed and humiliated for three hundred years was followed by a counter-Reformation which re-established Catholicism in Bohemia and Moravia. No patriotic Czech whatever his religion ever forgets these facts.

Certainly, young Eduard Beneš did not forget them.

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He imbibed them in the books he pored over at home; he heard them from the teachers at school; he wove them into his very frame when like all Czech boys and girls he joined the Sokol movement.¹ As his studies in Prague progressed, he sat at the feet of Professor Masaryk, when the passionate longing of the Czech race to re-possess its own soil and soul was finally established in him as the goal of his life's work.

The stars in their courses fighting for the future Czechoslovak State decreed that two years before Eduard Beneš was born the Czech national movement should win a great victory in the sphere of education. The Charles University at Prague, which since the extinction of Czech liberty at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 had been a germanized institution, was handed back to the Czechs. Thomas Masaryk, the Moravian Slovak, who was then working as a Reader in Vienna University, was called by the Austrian Minister of Education to take a professorship, thus showing that the close and natural affinity of the two races was a recognized fact in Austria-Hungary over thirty years before the World War.

¹ The Sokol movement was founded by Miroslav Tyrš in 1862 ostensibly as an athletic society, but really as a rallying-point for those who wanted to resuscitate Czech nationalism. It started with seventy-five members and grew to comprise all the able-bodied young (Czech and Slovak) men and women of the country. It soon spread among the other Slav minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and among the emigrants in France, Germany, the United States, and Great Britain.

The word Sokol means Falcon, and the motto of the movement is "*Ni Zisk ni Sláva*"—"Neither Gain nor Glory".

It is characteristic of Masaryk that he did not want to go. So he made all sorts of excuses: he did not like lecturing, he couldn't speak Czech fluently enough—after all, was he not a Slovak and educated at a German-speaking university? Though he could speak and write French, English, German, Italian, and Russian, his Czech was not at that time very good, and for this reason above all he succeeded in persuading himself that he was not the right man for the job. He told himself, very truly, that he had no friends in Prague and that the other professors would be jealous of him—in short, that it would be much better to stay in Vienna. But his wife, who though an American was rapidly becoming at least as Czech as her husband was, wanted to go. So they went.

Masaryk's fears were fully justified. The other professors certainly were jealous of him. They accused him of being a traitor to the Czech national cause because with his usual honesty he had denounced as a modern forgery some allegedly ancient manuscripts which depicted early Czech literature and history in colours which flattered the vanity of nineteenth-century Czech patriots. But already in those struggling days Masaryk had learned that (in his own picturesque adaptation of the German proverb) a lie has short legs even when told with the best intentions. Czech pride, Czech culture, he told his opponents, must be based on the truth and nothing but the truth. For him it was a moral and patriotic issue to track the forgery down. In order to do so he read the whole of the literature of the period of the Czech national revival. He followed the trail right back into the past, to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, to

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John Hus and to John Žižka, military chief of the Hussite movement, and forward again to the musicians, poets, and novelists of the nineteenth century who laid the early foundations of independent Czechoslovakia. Thus, albeit quite unknowingly, he fitted himself to be the future architect and father of a new State.

The next unwitting milestone in the new State's growth came twenty-two years later in 1904. During the interval Masaryk's colossal industry and transparent honesty had gradually won him an unassailable position in Prague. But even after twenty-two years when young Eduard Beneš arrived at the Charles University, the city was divided into two groups, Masaryk's friends and Masaryk's enemies, the latter being still in a considerable majority. It had taken Masaryk no less than thirteen years instead of the three he had expected to climb from the subordinate position of "Professor-in-Extraordinary"—or, as one might say—supernumerary Professor—to the full rank of Professor-in-Ordinary of Philosophy. This was another of the many positions he found himself in when he wanted to be doing something else. Masaryk's passion at that time was no longer the blacksmith's forge, but to be Professor of Sociology. Sociology was Eduard Beneš's favourite subject, though actually he went to the Charles University to study philosophy for the very good and sufficient reason that sociology was not yet on the curriculum. Hence it was that as a student of philosophy he found himself in the orbit of Professor Masaryk.

Characteristically, Eduard Beneš never talks about his struggles during that first year at the Charles. Once in his *War Memoirs* he casually mentions the "hardships of life"

which he underwent during his early training. But his habitual reticence in personal matters is so ingrained that even in conversation he does not easily speak of these things.

We know, however, that he was far too poor to attend the university as a full-time student. But it is doubtful whether he would have attended if he had been as rich as Croesus. Even at school he had been noted for a certain audacity in his methods of study, and the habits he acquired there have persisted since. He had, and has, a flair for imbibing knowledge with a minimum of exertion and time. As soon as he had memorized enough to satisfy his teachers he used the convenient shield of his desk to hide the fact that he was reading something more to his taste than school text-books. To his nephew Bohus Beneš¹ belongs the credit for this discovery. He afterwards went to the same secondary school in Prague and tried the same trick on the same teachers. They used to tell him so when they caught him (which was often), adding, "You're not so clever at it as your uncle was!"

At that school in the Kralovske Vinhrady (or, as we should say, King's Vineyard) district of Prague, Eduard Beneš laid a foundation of anti-royalist nationalism on which he built with great effect at the Charles University and still greater when he went to Paris. The education was in the Czech tongue, but was subtly directed to the building up of the influence of the House of Habsburg and of the Austrian domination. Frequently the boys had to sing the Austrian National Anthem. Eduard Beneš opened his mouth as wide as anybody but no sound came

¹ Son of Wenceslas.

out, except when one of the teachers, occasionally suspicious—or conscientious—used to come and put his ear to the gap. Be it added that the old boy in question bore no malice and did his best to help his rather refractory and certainly original pupil. At this school, Eduard was grounded in three living languages, German, French, and English, and two dead ones, Latin and Greek. He soon mastered the theory of them, but the pronunciation eluded him then and rather surprisingly still does.

When his father first sent him to Prague after he had imbibed all that the village school at Kožlany could teach him, Eduard Beneš went to stay with his eldest brother Wenceslas. But the Kožlany independence would not let him remain long as a non-paying guest even in a brother's house. He soon found he could make a little money by coaching backward boys for their examinations, and by the time he was fifteen he had moved into lodgings of his own. He has been financially independent ever since.

Not that he was a mere passenger even when he was still living with his brother. Wenceslas was himself a teacher and in his spare time, besides embarking on a little politics in the Social Democratic interest, he ran first one shorthand magazine for the self-instruction of stenographers, and ultimately two. Eduard learned shorthand and used to help his brother. The notes for his speeches and books even to-day are all in shorthand, which is one of the reasons he is able to find time for such a lot of other things besides speechifying and writing. There are not many days in the year in which his appointment book stops short of thirty people—each of them anxious to talk to him about some different subject with

which they generally find he already has more than a mere nodding acquaintance.

When Eduard Beneš joined the Charles University he continued to earn his own living as he had done at school. He did some free-lance journalism mainly for two papers, the Socialist daily, *Právo Lidu*, and the *Volná Myšlenka*; he also helped the university professors with the research work for their lectures and did a little private coaching on his own account. Of these three sources of income, the free-lancing was the most important—not so much on account of the amount of money it brought in, which was almost ludicrously small, but because it was another stage in the pre-natal development of the Czechoslovak State. Eduard Beneš earned his living almost entirely by his pen when he moved on to Paris at the end of his first year at the Charles University. And through his pen he not only developed his nationalist and republican ideals which provided him with most of the material for his articles, but was also brought into contact with people whose friendship was invaluable years later during the World War which gave birth to Czechoslovakia.

Eduard Beneš went to Paris on the advice of Professor Masaryk. It is characteristic of him that he should have asked the older man's advice—and still more so that he should have accepted it—for the two appeared to have curiously little in common, so little that at the outset of their acquaintance young Beneš was almost in the category of Masaryk's enemies. Masaryk, already over fifty, was Slovakia incarnate—an idealist and a poet with a strongly developed religious sense. Beneš was 100 per cent Czech—a matter-of-fact and dyed-in-the-wool rationalist who,

while not in any sense irreligious, had been driven to agnosticism.

Thus in those early days Beneš thought of Masaryk rather as someone who needed putting in his place than as a potential State-maker. He resisted the older man's influence and tried to belittle him in his own mind. He could not yet realize that a poet and visionary could also have a grasp of affairs and politics. He himself has no great flair for poetry. Like most people, however, he has tried his hand at it and once he was moved to write a patriotic ode about John Hus and John Žižka, but he afterwards tore it up. The poet of the family was Eduard's brother Vojta who went to America but who, unlike brother John, came home again after the War of Liberation. Vojta, like Wenceslas, was a school teacher and is the author of many volumes of prose and verse, most of the verse being for children.

Eduard, however, not being either a poet or visionary himself, quite naturally began by being definitely reserved towards Masaryk. The feeling soon passed, but it was not till the outbreak of the World War ten years later that the two men really came to understand one another. In the light of this fact their co-operation both while Eduard Beneš was still a student and afterwards is as unexpected as it is significant. It was something more than a co-operation of individuals. It typified a union of kindred races.

Characteristically, Eduard Beneš did not ask anybody for a penny in order to finance his stay in Paris. Contrast this with Masaryk, who borrowed £150 from his father-in-law immediately after his marriage and whose attitude

toward money is summed up in his phrase: "I have never been fond of it. When things were at their worst it has always turned up from somewhere." Masaryk told Karel Čapek that what pleased him most about being President was that he no longer had to carry money about with him. "I have nothing in my pockets but a pencil", he said. "I don't even know what Czech money looks like."

Eduard Beneš was the antithesis of Masaryk in money, as in other matters. Before he started for Paris he had saved sixty krone—about six pounds—which was more than enough for his fare. To provide for his keep he arranged to write "Paris Letters" for *Právo Lidu*, the Socialist daily in Prague, and for *Volná Myšlenka*. The remuneration was modest, but so were his needs—he lived in Paris on about four pounds a month. Almost his only extravagance at that time was his attempt to grow a beard. It was no more of a success than that ode, and he gave it up.

The year 1905 was an exhilarating one for politically minded students like Eduard Beneš. There was the Russian Revolution to feed the Socialist in him; separation of Church and State in France to whet his agnostic appetite. Yet his keen interest in the Russian Revolution did not make him a militant revolutionary, although he joined a Russian Revolutionary Society in Paris. Similarly—and this was thanks mainly to a short vacation visit to England—he went back to Prague more impressed with the value of religion as a social and political factor than when he left home.

His "practical experience of religious matters in England", he says in his *War Memoirs*, led him "to the

study of philosophy and theory of knowledge, and also to an anti-positivist change of views on religion".

Young Beneš spent two years in Paris and then a year in Berlin, after which he went back to Paris and Dijon to take a doctorate in law. But law was the least of the many things he learned during those three all-important years. His yearning for Czech autonomy became a veritable passion in the birthplace of the great revolutionary watchword Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. He was carried away—the phrase is his own—by the revolutionary and radical phraseology of the French socialists, syndicalists, and other Left Wing parties. He became absorbed in the study of the whole gamut of extremist movements, anarchism, anti-militarism, syndicalism, and at the other ominous extreme, Prussianism. With feverish labour (again his own words) he tried to dovetail a comprehensive study of the political, social, and cultural problems of France, England, and Germany in with the preparation of his thesis for a doctor's degree which necessitated his making a simultaneous investigation of conditions in Bohemia and Austria.

Those were the years when France was engaged not only in bitter controversy over separation of Church and State, but over the question of extending the period of military service to three years in order to combat the growing menace from Germany's armaments. Eduard Beneš came to the conclusion that France was on the whole pacifist and that England, in spite of outward disunity—over Protection and Free Trade, over her economic position in case of war, over the size of her fleet, over Irish Home Rule—had an inner strength

which, he says, could be felt on all sides. England moved him profoundly "by its harmony and order, by its development towards political and constitutional liberty, by its economic advance, by its endeavour in its national culture to form a harmonious human individuality" as well as "by the strength of religious feeling and conscious religious life which even the average Englishman reveals". Thus he returned home confirmed in his original opposition to the whole political and social conditions of the composite Habsburg Empire in which he lived. He had passed another milestone on the road to an independent Czechoslovakia.

If Beneš the student was attracted by France and England he was definitely repelled by Germany. He was present at the great military parade in Berlin in the summer of 1908 which was staged in part as a riposte to the meeting of King Edward VII with the Russian Czar at Reval¹ earlier in the year. Germany's display of armed strength overwhelmed him with its cannon-fodderish efficiency and gave him an instinctive feeling of dread when he thought of its possible effect on the small nation to which he belonged just across the southern frontier. Prussian bureaucracy, the proud insolence of the Prussian military caste, the non-political and herd-like character of the lovable German people—all alike aroused in him a lively sense of a doom which was inevitable, but whose nature he could not precisely forecast. When—thirty years ago just as to-day—Germany's industry and railways as well as army, navy, and public life generally, were all being co-ordinated to one end, the enhancement

¹ Now Tallinn, capital of Estonia.

of Germany's military glory, he felt sure that a cataclysm was only a question of time.

This indictment of Prussianism is not an afterthought arising from the tension between Czechs and Germany in 1938 and the crime of the German march on Prague in 1939. It is what Eduard Beneš really thought in 1908. It is based on his study of the writings of men like Houston Stewart Chamberlain who, in spite of his English origin, was the foremost apostle of Pan-Germanism, of the pamphleteer Rohrbach, who years before the World War of 1914-18 scattered throughout the length and breadth of Germany leaflets and booklets demanding an air fleet capable of landing hundreds of thousands of troops near London, Constantinople, Baghdad, and even as far afield as the Persian Gulf.

Perhaps such things as these would have affected Eduard Beneš less profoundly had he not sensed even then—and how true was his estimate was proved at the time of the Nazi Revolution in 1933—that German Socialism lacked revolutionary fire, that it was doctrinaire and prone to empty words which were “either a convenient pretext for not doing anything practical or else led to a blind and fanatical pursuit of an *idée fixe*”. Thus he could have no great faith in the development of a real German democratic spirit, but was convinced on the contrary that it would follow blindly wherever Germany's militaristic and race-proud leaders wanted.

Filled with ideas and forebodings such as these, Eduard Beneš returned to Prague in September 1908 determined to play a part in wresting recognition of Czech rights from Vienna. Whereas Germany filled him with

dread, the Habsburg Empire, he tells us, inspired him with loathing. He was determined not to rest till it had either been completely transformed—or broken in pieces. So he determined to go into politics and fight for the basic reshaping of the Habsburg Empire. He was at that time frankly a revolutionary in touch with the Russian anarchists and others who had planned the 1905 revolution. But unlike them he was not for revolution through violence. His early training and hardships had taught him to suppress passion and sentiments—to rule them by intellect—and to preserve a political calm and balance totally alien to the more mercurial Russian mentality. An almost fanatical believer in democracy he assured himself that universal suffrage, which was introduced in Austria in 1907, would of itself secure without an explosion the regeneration of the “ram-shackle” Habsburg Empire.

He was wrong, of course, but only just. If Archduke Francis Ferdinand had not been murdered at Serajevo on June 28, 1914, he might conceivably have been right. It is true that without the war it would presumably have been many more years than was actually the case before the Austrian-controlled Czechs and the Hungarian-controlled Slovaks could have come together. But young Beneš, then as now, was not in a hurry. He looked forward quite calmly to the prospect of having to give ten full years to the task of fitting himself for the political arena. Meanwhile he decided he would take a teaching post, go and have a look at Russia, and possibly qualify for a university professorship.

But before he had been back in Prague long, a *Deus ex*

machina in the person of Professor Masaryk took him in hand, suggested he should qualify for a university post in philosophy and sociology at once, and told him how to set about it. It was one of those flashes of kindly insight which were characteristic of Masaryk. Eduard Beneš, though his pupil for a short while, not only had no claims upon him, but also did not share his political views. That made no difference at all. Masaryk had read young Beneš's letters from Paris to *Právo Lidu* and saw the metal they were made of. Though in no way a revolutionary himself and not even a Socialist—he had his own political organization, the Progressive (Realist) Party—Masaryk took the revolutionary young student under his scholastic wing and got him that lectureship. Having done so, Masaryk betook himself back to Olympus—so much so that he could say of Beneš:¹ "Up to the war (six years later) my personal knowledge of him was slight."

For the next few years Eduard Beneš threw himself heart and soul into his lecturing. Though pressed to join several political parties he did not do so. He knew what his ultimate aim was, but was uncertain how best to achieve it. Until he knew, he would wait. Ultimately he joined Masaryk's Realists and immediately went into what he has called "a kind of moderate opposition" in it. He thought the older Realists too doctrinaire, too absorbed in intellectuality, too non-revolutionary. So he quietly set about organizing the younger Realists with a view to forming a larger party of more radical tendencies. The war came before he was ready. But after the war was

¹ *The Making of a State.*

ended, he achieved this ambition, becoming leader of a party called the National Socialists. Needless to say this party had not a single plank in common with Hitler's National Socialist Party which at that time had not even been thought of.

Instead of going to Russia, Beneš got married. Hana Vlčková was the daughter of an unimportant railway employee. Both her parents died when she was young and she was adopted by a rich aunt who sent her first to the technical school for girls and after that she permitted her niece to leave for Paris where Anna Vlčková became a university student. Later on she left her all her considerable fortune. We shall hear a good deal more of Hana Vlčková—Anna Little She-Wolf. She and her husband were, in quite a different way, as ideal a couple as Thomas Masaryk and Charlotte Garrigue, and that is saying a good deal. Beneš, reserved and matter of fact, does not wear his heart on his sleeve. But if anything could have kept him from slipping over the Austrian frontier during the World War it would have been the knowledge that his wife had to remain behind. It meant prison for her at best. But she would not have had it otherwise.

Edward Beneš met Hana in Paris where she was studying with two or three other Czech girls. He wrote home and spoke of meeting them, mentioning who all of them were except Hana, and cautiously describing them collectively as "not bad sorts".

Hana was at that time called Anna. She asked Eduard Beneš one day why he did not call her Anna as other people did, and he said that it was because there was

another Anna at his old home in Kožlany. Then he added suddenly that as he had changed her first name he would like also to change her second, and thus it is that for Anna Vlčková there is to-day Hana Benešova. Even though he was in deadly earnest, there was a touch of humour in his method of proposal, for Beneš in Czech signifies Benedict.

The other Anna was the daughter of a Kožlany farmer whom Eduard Beneš had known since childhood. Anitchka (Little Anna) did not want Eduard to go to Paris. "If you were really clever", she told him, "you would be able to stay here and marry me." Eduard, and the fates who were spinning the web that was to be Czechoslovakia, thought otherwise.

Beneš the Benedict and Hana his wife pulled, and still pull, together to an extent rare even among the really happily married of the world. Their interests are identical, their outlook similar; they have studied the same subjects, held the same national, political, and even personal ideals. If Eduard was and is a hard worker, so is his wife. Throughout his career she has stood beside as well as behind him. Her part in the genesis of the Czechoslovak State has been less spectacular than her husband's, but the Republic was her child almost as much as Eduard's and Masaryk's. She has been denied other children. It might have been otherwise but for the war which brought her persecution, privation, and serious illness.

The four years between marriage and the outbreak of the World War were for the Beneš's *menage* years

of happy endeavour during which they completed their philosophical and political development. While Masaryk as usual was in the forefront of controversy, forming societies, starting newspapers and movements, taking up the cudgels on behalf of Croats and Slovenes as well as of Czechs and Slovaks, travelling to America, to Russia, to Italy, Eduard Beneš and Hana went quietly along, thinking, discussing, writing, and above all working till they had established calm and solid convictions on the social, religious, and political problems with which they and the Czechs generally were confronted.

A little before the war, Hana's aunt died and left her niece her considerable fortune. Frugal like her husband, Hana did not allow this new wealth to drive her into a new mode of life. Extravagant spending was no part of the philosophy she and Eduard had built up for themselves. Society did not attract her nor did she want to dress expensively. Her outlook on riches was that they are a trust for humanity. On a Cause she was ready to spend freely, but not on herself. Eduard Beneš felt exactly the same.

The Cause soon presented itself. The tragedy of Serajevo and the thunder of Austrian artillery against Belgrade which followed six weeks later, threw the minorities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a state of uncontrollable excitement. Would the war bring them freedom or rivet their servitude still more strongly? Were they to be loyal to the Habsburgs in the hope that gratitude would bring its sure reward when victory was won? Were they to adopt an attitude of passivity until they saw definitely which way the wind was blowing?

Or were they to work actively yet secretly to overthrow the Habsburgs and all their works?

Eduard Beneš had no doubts on the matter. In his characteristically Czech fashion he had hammered out a mode of life and a political objective on the anvil of his analytical mind. He knew exactly what he wanted and how to set about getting it.

Politically, spiritually, socially, he was grown up and he knew, as he tells us in his *War Memoirs*, what he "could, would, and must do" at this great moment when new States were leaping in the womb of Europe. He was certain that the outbreak of war spelt "The Day" as much for Czechs as for Germans. He felt himself the instrument of Providence and had an inner conviction that he would be guided to do what was best for the race to which he belonged.

Right up to the last moment, however, he thought war would be averted. His careful study of the internal situation of the Habsburg Empire had convinced him that it would not stand the strain of war, and he gave its rulers credit for a similar prescience. He had expected an Anglo-German war—over Germany's desire for expansion, for raw materials, for a great empire. But he thought that both Austria-Hungary and Russia would keep out of such a conflict because he had sensed the depth of the social and political unrest in these countries and foresaw that even a victorious war would bring a revolution which it was in the interests of the ruling classes to prevent.

But when to his surprise war came and the two tottering autocracies were both in it, Eduard Beneš had no gnawing doubts to torture his conscience. If Austria-

Hungary won, there would be a revolution afterwards. If it lost, the revolution would come earlier. The moment England decided to enter the war, he felt certain of the ultimate outcome and neither the first battle of the Marne, nor the failure of Gallipoli, nor even the triumphant German offensive of March 1918 shook his firm conviction that the Allied and Associated Powers would emerge the victors in the end. From August 1914 his plans were made and executed on that assumption.

Beneš's first move was to hurry back to Prague. He had been holidaying in the country and he wanted to see how the various Czech political parties were reacting to the situation. He found most of them urging a passive policy and some even expressing fulsome praise of the Vienna Government. But the younger men whom he cautiously sounded were of a different metal. They wanted to be doing something. Many of them, however, had been caught by the mobilization order and were already perforce doing something they very much wanted not to do. In short, they were fighting for instead of against Austria.

Masaryk, who was also on holiday—in Saxony—when war began saw some of the young Czech soldiers on their way to the front as he was coming home to Prague. Greatly daring, he ventured a few sceptical remarks on the subject of the war. A sergeant-major answered him. Masaryk in *The Making of a State* says: "I can still see the poor fellow's big eyes as he looked at me and asked sadly, 'What can we do?'"

Masaryk, like Beneš, knew exactly what he intended to do, and though neither had spoken to the other on the subject their attitudes were almost identical. Some weeks

were still to elapse before they exchanged confidences. During this time, Eduard Beneš got himself a passport in case he should be called upon to follow Masaryk's sergeant-major. Thanks to a broken leg which cut short a promising career as a star amateur footballer he had escaped the peace-time liability to perform military training. But he rightly guessed that later medical examinations would be less meticulous. Before the war he had been able to travel where he would without a passport. But the war had changed all that and he wanted to be able to leave the country at a moment's notice if need should arise. He kept that passport and a little nest-egg of money in an inner pocket of his waistcoat. We shall hear more about the Beneš passport before long.

Masaryk, again like Beneš, started sounding out his friends as soon as he got back to Prague. He was a member of the Austrian Parliament and found some of his fellow-members too scared to come near him. He himself—though for very different reasons—was equally scared of some of them, and said no more than he could help to anybody in case the Austrian police should begin to suspect him. Eduard Beneš was in exactly the same predicament. Though he wanted desperately to talk openly to Masaryk it was six weeks before the two men opened their hearts to one another. Beneš's first step was to obtain work as an unpaid contributor to *Čas*,¹ Masaryk's newspaper. Each day there was an editorial conference in which both he and Masaryk took part. Gradually each became convinced that he could trust the other. One day, Beneš went to Masaryk's house before the meeting and

¹ *Time*.

hinted at what was in his mind. "Good", said Masaryk at once, "I am at it already. Now we can work together."

Both Masaryk and Beneš have written of that afternoon in the early autumn of 1914, which started one of the strangest and most fateful partnerships of history. It was a lovely day, and as they talked they looked across the Vltava from the steep slope of Leina Park on to the venerable hundred towers of Prague which as the outcome of that conversation were to resume the independence they had not known for three centuries. They spoke of the situation at home, of events in France, Russia, and England, of their friends at home and abroad. Masaryk has confessed that for once in his life he thought of money—"the sinews of political war", as he called it. Beneš reckoned up his resources and promised several thousand crowns. The independence of Czechoslovakia was built on those two or three hundred pounds Eduard Beneš threw into the scales on behalf of himself and his wife at that moment.

Masaryk says that he and Beneš "agreed at once" during this conversation. Beneš, however, declares that there was still some slight reserve between them, but that gradually this was broken down. They used to walk home together from the office and by degrees the older man told the younger things he had not dared to speak about before the others. He disclosed, for instance, that he was already in touch with the head of the Sokol movement,¹ and that he was getting confidential reports from a Czech in Vienna who was a servant in the home of the Austrian Minister of the Interior. Through this man, whose name

¹ See footnote on page 23.

was Kovanda, Masaryk and Beneš used to get copies of secret documents and letters of the utmost importance dealing with the political plans of the Austrian Cabinet and General Staff. There can be little doubt that but for Kovanda both of them would have soon been in prison.

For obvious reasons, these documents were not entrusted to the tender mercies of the Austrian postal authorities. At the start, Masaryk used to go to Vienna himself to fetch them. Later on he sometimes sent Eduard Beneš instead. Both Beneš and Masaryk were careful to see as little of Kovanda as possible. The go-between was a Czech writer named J. S. Machar, who when he had anything of importance to communicate from Kovanda used to send an ordinary postcard to the editorial offices of a Prague monthly review called *Naše Doba* (*Our Era*) to say that he had a manuscript ready. Masaryk—or Beneš—used to go to Vienna to fetch it by the next train.

From the Dual Monarchy's point of view, the pair were of course arch conspirators—even traitors. There would have been no mercy for them if they had been found out. They knew that perfectly well and played their cards accordingly, although both of them, Beneš in particular, took surprisingly little care to cover up their tracks. Why they were not caught and executed before the war was a year old is one of those mysteries which cannot be explained. Let it not be supposed, however, that if they had been, Czechoslovakia would never have come into being. It would merely have been architected in some other—and probably more happy-go-lucky—way.

It is worth while taking just a glance at these two

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State-builders as they were when the babe that was to become Czechoslovakia first began to quicken. When the World War started Masaryk was already sixty-four, whereas Beneš was only just thirty. In the normal course of events the older man could have felt entitled to a life of increasing leisure instead of which he was to cram the works of a couple of lives into the next twenty years. He both sired a State and nursed it through infancy. But without an Eduard Beneš to fetch and carry, to attend to the petty details and turn distant objective into practical achievement, Masaryk could scarcely have succeeded. And there can be little doubt that the foundations of the Czechoslovak State would have been laid far less securely and fairly without a Masaryk and a Beneš to superintend operations.

Physically, the veteran was to have a much harder time of it during those twenty years than the young man in his prime. Masaryk wandered much farther afield, and even got mixed up in the fighting which Eduard Beneš quite unintentionally avoided. Beneš was to find most of his wartime work in Paris; Masaryk among other things became a professor in London, got caught up in the Bolshevik Revolution, and went round the world via Siberia and America. Besides this visit—his second—to the United States, Masaryk, during the war years, spent some time in Holland, Switzerland, Italy, as well as France. In his spare time, such as it was, he learned to ride a horse—in case he should have to go to Serbia where a number of Czech soldiers who had deserted from the Austrian army had congregated.

For the moment, however, Masaryk and Beneš are still

in Prague. The war is only a few months old and on the face of things Germany and her allies have the better of it. Masaryk and Beneš are playing a lone and secret hand. They have no clear-cut plan of campaign, no final objective other than to promote the Czech national cause to the utmost of their ability. They have a few friends on whom they feel they can rely in Prague, one or two in Vienna, and one or two in England and America. Among the Americans is to be mentioned Capt. E. Voska, a Czech emigrant, whom Masaryk had met in the United States; among the Englishmen there is Wickham Steed, former *Times* correspondent in Vienna and in 1914 its Foreign Editor, and there is Seton-Watson, lecturer in the University of London.

In August, when the war was only a few weeks old, Masaryk had sent a verbal message to Wickham Steed by Captain Voska who happened providentially to be in Prague when the war began. The message spoke of the persecution of Czechs which was already in progress in the Dual Monarchy, outlined the financial and military position, and finally asked Steed to tell the Russian General Staff to be prepared for Czech deserters from the Austrian army to come across into the Russian lines. Steed replied by giving a password—the song “Hej Slovane” which was a favourite with both branches of the Slav race and which would safeguard Czech deserters from being shot at. Thus was started a chain of circumstances which was to lead to the formation, in which Eduard Beneš played an important part, of a Czechoslovak army fighting for the Allied cause on the front in France. We shall hear a great deal more about this later on.

A little while before Beneš and Masaryk had their conversation in Letna Park, Masaryk had slipped out of Austria, ostensibly to see his American sister-in-law on to her boat at Rotterdam. While there he got into touch with Steed and Seton-Watson and arranged to go back to Rotterdam a month later to meet the latter. Together they drafted a memorandum on the Czech question and Seton-Watson afterwards laid it before the Allied Governments in London, Paris, and St. Petersburg. Though Eduard Beneš played no part in moulding this memorandum, the memorandum certainly played a part in moulding the career of Eduard Beneš, for in it there appears the first wartime reference to the State rights of the ancient kingdom of Bohemia with its historical frontier along the Böhmerwald and the Riesengebirge. Masaryk has recorded that his claim to the historic frontier between Bohemia and Germany surprised Seton-Watson, who thought then more in terms of nationality. Perhaps instead of the word "nationality" one should rather say "language", for the so-called Sudeten-Deutsch or South Germans in Czechoslovakia are by no means pure Teuton, and if one probes deeply enough one finds that the antagonism is not really a racial matter at all, but a struggle for supremacy between two cultures, Slav and Teuton.

Be that as it may, when the time came to negotiate peace, Eduard Beneš stood stoutly on Masaryk's ground about the necessity of maintaining the historic patrimony intact with, however, one important modification in favour of Germany. Twenty years later, he was still standing there. The local elections which focused the

war-clouds in the summer of 1938 showed that practically every Czech and three out of every four Slovaks held the same opinion as he did on the frontier issue. The events of May 21, 1938, when Eduard Beneš as President ordered a partial mobilization of the Czechoslovak army to counter what appeared to be an impending attack on that frontier, showed further that the Czechoslovak nation was prepared to fight rather than allow the frontier to be violated. The defection of their friends undermined their resolution, but the fate of the Munich "settlement" which was so cynically set aside when Bohemia and Moravia were annexed not six months later, shows that the instinct which bade Beneš stand firm for the historic frontier was a right one.

Another outcome of Masaryk's meeting with Seton-Watson at Rotterdam was a decision to widen the scope of his secret activities in Prague. It was risky, of course, but he and Seton-Watson felt that the only way to convince the statesmen of the Allied countries that there was such a thing as a Czech national movement was to show them that it was something bigger than a mere verbal aspiration of two university professors, Masaryk and Beneš. Already a start had been made at organizing a secret "focus" (the word is Beneš's own) known as the Maffia. Now Masaryk began to concentrate on winning over his Czech colleagues in the Vienna Parliament. Gradually an organization was built up which continued to function in Prague throughout the war. Sometimes one of its members would be arrested or have to flee the country. Some of them were shot as traitors. But the Maffia as a whole remained undiscovered. It was never completely broken up, and

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when the Austro-Hungarian Empire began to crumble in the autumn of 1918 its members formed the nucleus of the first Czechoslovak Cabinet.

Young Eduard Beneš was comparatively small fry at the early meetings of the Maffia. His colleagues were mostly M.P.s in the Austrian parliament, and writers whose spurs had already been won. But he soon won his spurs, too. Accepted first of all as merely the confidential factotum of Masaryk he soon quite quietly and efficiently made himself indispensable. It was as Masaryk's deputy in the editorial chair of *Naše Doba* that he went to Vienna to fetch those "manuscripts" of Kovanda's. And it was as Masaryk's assistant that he started to go to Dresden to fetch certain English newspapers which Wickham Steed sent for Masaryk's use. But it was Eduard Beneš's own idea to add Italian, Roumanian, and Dutch papers to *The Times* and the *Morning Post*. A limited number of foreign newspapers were still allowed in Germany at that time (October 1914) although they were already forbidden in Austria-Hungary. So after collecting the batch of papers at the Dresden G.P.O., Beneš used to stroll across to the café opposite the railway station where it happened there were some Czech waiters.

It was easy enough to take the bundles of newspapers they gave him. But smuggling them across the Austrian frontier was quite another matter.

A week before Christmas, 1914, Masaryk went abroad again, not to Rotterdam this time but to Italy. Before going he dictated a manifesto to Beneš to be published if the Russians should succeed in reaching Praguc. He also outlined a plan for uniting the two provinces of Bohemia

and Moravia-Silesia. These were still the days before either Masaryk or Beneš fully envisaged the complete break-up of the Habsburg Empire. Consequently, they confined their attention to the two Czech provinces, both of which were in Austria. It was not till later that they began to envisage the possibility of joining the Hungarian province of Slovakia to the Czech Historic Lands.

Beneš took Masaryk's notes down in shorthand as was his wont. Months later, when he was expecting his house to be searched, he destroyed all incriminating documents in his possession but these. He wanted to preserve them, he says in his *War Memoirs*, "for every eventuality". Before he fled abroad in September 1915 he buried the notes together with some other messages from Masaryk in a bottle in a garden some twenty miles from Prague along the road to Carlsbad. He never had a chance to look for them till 1922, but after a long search he eventually found the bottle and its contents intact. His action even more perhaps than his comment betrays an unsuspected vein of sentiment which he generally manages to keep out of sight. In this record of his life, we shall only meet it twice. The second time was in Paris in August 1917 when the war was just three years old. It again is connected with Masaryk.

Shortly after Masaryk reached Italy, news began to filter through to Beneš from Kovanda that the Austrian police were beginning to keep an eye on Masaryk's movements. Edward Beneš did not know what to do. He could not warn Masaryk in case his letters were opened *en route*. But the Austrian Ambassador in Rome—Italy was still neutral—solved the difficulty for him by speak-

ing very unfavourably about Masaryk's activities, and Masaryk who had friends in Rome happened to hear of it. When he went on from Italy to Switzerland in January 1915 he sent a messenger to Beneš from Zürich to ask whether it was safe for him to return. Beneš replied by messenger and code cable that his return was out of the question. Then, fearing that both messenger and message might have miscarried, or be disregarded, he suddenly decided to go to Zürich himself.

It was a most hazardous decision. As we know, Beneš had taken the precaution of providing himself with a passport. But though issued as recently as August 1914 it was already out of date. Subsequent orders had been given that all passports must have their owner's photograph. But Beneš had no photograph on his and he did not dare try to get a new passport because he had—as he had foreseen—been called up for military service and had no intention of obeying the summons. He knew that he could not get permission from the military authorities to go abroad in such circumstances. However, he managed to secure an identity card through an old school friend who worked at the police headquarters in the same district of Prague in which Beneš happened to be living. Armed with this and his old passport he set off for Zürich. Several times the police and frontier guards seemed about to stop him, but he bluffed his way through.

Beneš's instinct had been right in warning him that Masaryk would have disregarded the injunction not to return to Prague. It was with difficulty that Beneš persuaded him to stay in Switzerland. But having once made up his mind, Masaryk never did things by halves.

In the end he told Beneš he had decided to stay out of Bohemia till the war was over. From beyond the Austrian frontier he would organize a resolute campaign against the Habsburgs. He would get into touch, he said, with the Czech political *émigrés* and bring them into the war on the side of the Allies. All this meant he must have money. Masaryk instructed Beneš to get what he could in Prague while he himself solicited help from the Czechs and their sympathizers in the United States. Beneš was to be the link between the two groups inside and outside Bohemia.

It was the most difficult and dangerous rôle of all, but Masaryk knew what he was about when he offered it to Beneš.

During those few days in Zürich, Masaryk and Beneš, with the help of a Russian journalist named Vsevolod Svatkovsky,¹ worked out the whole technique of future Czech revolt. They arranged a special telegraphic code, a scheme for sending couriers to one another, planned the details of a secret printing press in a secluded spot not too far from Prague, and drew up a list of names of devoted men and women who were to be allotted the most dangerous jobs, together with substitutes who were to take the place of any who were arrested. Then Masaryk betook himself to Geneva where was a little colony of Czechs in humble circumstances: tailors, artisans, and so forth. One of them, named Pan Svobody, or as we should say, Mr. Freedom, owned a restaurant called the Café de Genève. Masaryk used to forgather here with his fellow-countrymen, and one day one of them, carried away by

¹ His name shows that he was of Czech origin.

the vision of a free Bohemia conjured up by the magic of Masaryk's enthusiasm, raised his glass and hailed Masaryk as the first President of the Republic-to-be. Shortly afterwards, Masaryk himself made his first public pronouncement in the famous Salle de la Réformation in Geneva, proclaiming the goal of an independent Republic of Bohemia. But he forgot all about the other half of the Svoboda toast, for as he told Karel Čapek years later: "When I received the telegram (in America) telling me that they had elected me President at home—well, I simply hadn't thought of it till then."

Beneš meanwhile was again in Prague. It had not been easy to get back there. First of all, the Austrian Consul in Zürich started asking unpleasant questions about his invalid passport. In the end, he had it taken from him and replaced by another, valid only till he got back to Prague. Then there was the question of getting his secret code and other incriminating documents, including a large parcel of what he calls "questionable" books, across the frontier. The documents Beneš merely shoved under the seat. The books—questionable only in the political sense—he hid in the lavatory among the belongings of the railway employees. He had a few bad minutes while the officials were going their rounds, but both officials and minutes soon passed. After all, if anything had been discovered, there was really nothing to inculpate Beneš. The railway employees might have had some trouble in explaining away the books, but that was their look-out, not his. It was a trick he played again several times and always with success.

Intending revolutionaries should take note of the fact

that in planning to win independence from the Austrians, Masaryk and Beneš made it a rule never to do the obvious. They eschewed entirely such outmoded things as false bottoms in trunks and secret caches in clothing. Instead they hid slips of paper under the regulators of watches and in pencils from which a piece of lead had been extracted. One of Masaryk's friends in Geneva, an engineer, invented a special cyphering machine; another, a joiner, made special chests and boxes with secret slits in the sides instead of in the bottoms. He did it so well that no amount of tapping revealed that the sides were not solid. Beneš himself took infinite pains splitting post-cards in two. The bookbinder at his secret printing press then stuck the pieces together again so skilfully that the censor never suspected a cypher message had found its way between them in the process. Beneš and the bookbinder used also to perform similar operations on the covers and backs of apparently harmless books which they then sent boldly through the post.

It has to be recorded, however, that in Masaryk's opinion Beneš was much too careless—imprudent would perhaps be a better word. Beneš himself holds that his methods strengthened his nerves and helped to cultivate presence of mind. But it may be doubted whether it was entirely necessary to take such risks as he did once at the German frontier station of Arlberg. He had with him a number of those "questionable books", and all he did when the officials came round was to put them under a couple of "safe" books and cover the pile with a copy of the humorous Berlin paper *Simplicissimus*. The official looked at *Simplicissimus*, opened the top (safe) book to see

if there were any loose papers in it, and then took himself off. At the Austro-German frontier Beneš reverted to the old lavatory trick, taking his bundle out again when he was safely in Austria.

Another rôle Beneš took upon himself at that time was that of manipulator of passports. By early 1915 the Austrian authorities had stopped issuing passports, and as it was impossible for the Maffia's courier service between Prague and Geneva to function without them, passports had to be provided. A sympathizer managed to get hold of blank forms from the local passport office in Prague, while Beneš himself bought up some valid Austrian passports which their owners did not want and also secured a few foreign ones as well, most of them curiously enough Bulgarian. Bulgarian sympathy for the Czechs as fellow-Slavs has always been considerable.

When some months later Beneš had to flee from Prague to escape arrest he used one of these faked passports. It was made out in the name of Miroslav Šicha, a commercial traveller. There really was a Miroslav Šicha and he really had a passport. But when it was first issued it did not have either the necessary military counter-signature or a Swiss visa, or, be it added, the photograph of Eduard Beneš. Both the military endorsement and the Swiss visa Beneš obtained quite openly by going himself to the office concerned—sure proof that Masaryk was right about his imprudence and that Beneš was quite wrong in suggesting that his nerves and presence of mind needed any strengthening. The truth is that for his own safety and that of the whole independence movement his nerves were a good deal too strong already.

CHAPTER TWO

Travail

THE MAFFIA redoubled its activity when Beneš returned from Switzerland after his conference with Masaryk in January 1915. Gradually, however, some of its members began to be subjected to unwelcome attentions on the part of the Austrian police. The first blow fell on May 20, 1915, when the house of one of its leading members¹ was searched at the precise moment that Beneš—fortunately not in the house in question—was triumphantly distributing to a specially called meeting copies of the first number of *La Nation Tchèque*, a review published by Masaryk and the French scholar, Professor E. Denis, in Paris and smuggled over the Austrian border in one of the Genevan hollow-sided trunks. The meeting broke up in haste and Beneš himself, with his usual effrontery, spent the rest of the evening till well past midnight walking up and down outside Dr. Scheiner's house to see what he could see of what the police were doing inside. All he was able to distinguish, however, was a number of shadowy forms moving about, and in the end he gave it up and went home. Next morning he learned that Dr. Scheiner had been arrested and taken to Vienna.

¹ Dr. Scheiner, afterwards Inspector-General of the Czechoslovak army and for many years head of the Sokols.

Another prominent Maffia-ist, Dr. Kramář,¹ was arrested at the same time as Dr. Scheiner. Beneš did not hear of this until the next morning and when he was told about it by one of his fellow-conspirators whom he met by arrangement at the Parliament Café he felt certain the Maffia's game was up and that he should leave the country at once. Over his cup of coffee he wrote to his wife giving her directions about certain family matters. He gave the letter to a friend to hand to Hana personally, and then instead of leaving Prague he—went home, just in case he had made a mistake and there was no need for him to run away after all!

With unusual caution, however, he spent the whole morning watching before he ventured into the house. The coast seemed clear, but was it? Certainly Hana had not put the pre-arranged warning on the window-sill and there were no suspicious-looking people loitering near the door. But perhaps the signal had been discovered and the door left unguarded simply to trap him. So he decided not to take the risk of going straight in. Most people would have thought the risk of hanging about outside almost equally great and the suspense of doing so quite intolerable. Not so Beneš. He waited nearly three hours—till mid-day—and then walked boldly in. Once inside he hastily got rid of all incriminating documents—except those notes Masaryk had dictated to him—and then calmly sat down to wait and see what happened next.

¹ Afterwards first Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic and head of the Czechoslovak Delegation at the Peace Conference. See Chapter Four.

Actually nothing happened. In a day or two it transpired that Scheiner and Kramář had not been arrested because of their connection with the Maffia but because the military authorities thought they were interfering with the loyalty of the Czech soldiers. So Beneš and the remaining members of the Maffia were soon carrying on as before, organizing and reorganizing to get as many Czechs of military age out of the country, persuading Czech soldiers to desert, planning subversive activity at home, sending reports of the plans of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff for Masaryk to convey to interested people abroad—in short, engaging in all the normal business of revolutionaries. It was all very dark and subterranean, but it had its lighter side—as, for instance, when Eduard Beneš's elder brother, Vojta, managed to get leave from the Austro-Hungarian authorities to go to the United States to investigate the supply of artificial limbs for wounded soldiers. Vojta reached the United States safely, early in August 1915, and in due course he raised quite a lot of money. But Vienna soon discovered that wounded Austrians in need of artificial limbs were not going to derive much benefit from his activities. Vojta's efforts were exclusively devoted to capitalizing the enthusiasm of the Czech and Slovak colonists on behalf of the cause of Czechoslovak independence.

Realization of what Vojta Beneš was doing in America soon made the Austrian authorities begin to be suspicious of Eduard. Fortunately, however, Vojta had a brother-in-law who was in the Prague police, and thus Eduard was able to keep an even closer watch on the police than

the police were keeping on him. Thus it happened that after perusing the dossier which had been compiled about his activities, he decided it really was time to get out of the country.

Accordingly towards the end of August 1915 he left Prague, ostensibly on a holiday. He had all his plans ready. He was to come back to Prague without luggage, make his way thence to Budapest and so via Transylvania and Rumania (which was still neutral) to Russia. From Russia he was to find his way as best he could to Masaryk, who was in Switzerland impatiently waiting for news of the Maffia's plans which no less than four people had unsuccessfully tried to take out of the country to him.

At the last moment Beneš scrapped the whole idea. He was not quite sure whether he could trust the Transylvanian priest who was to have helped him across the Rumanian frontier, so when he heard that an old fellow-student was medical officer to the garrison at Asch in the Sudeten districts of Bohemia he decided to ask the loan of a military uniform in which to get himself across the frontier into Germany. The most potent reason for his change of plan was that he was not quite sure about his forged passport. He felt it might be good enough to pass muster in Germany, but was not likely to deceive the Austrian and Hungarian authorities. Actually, when Masaryk saw that alleged passport in Geneva he was furious that Beneš should have dared to use such a clumsy affair. Even the Germans were suspicious of it. They gave the so-called Miroslav Šicha a deservedly anxious time at Constance where he was examined for several hours by the German frontier

TRAVAIL

guard. But they let him through in the end. That he would never have got out of Austria if it had not been for the uniform his doctor friend with much trepidation procured for him is in the circumstances obvious.

When Beneš started his flight on September 1st, Hana went with him to the station with his only luggage—a small handbag—hidden under her cloak. His first task on his arrival in Switzerland on September 3rd was to send her a prearranged telegram. It must have been like signing a warrant for her arrest. But they had talked over everything before he left and he knew that she was prepared to go right through to the bitter end. He knew, too, that her task involved at least as much personal danger as his. In order to reduce that danger to a minimum they had thought out what she was to say when the police came to question her, and even what to do when they put her under the third degree. Beneš urged Hana to repudiate him if things became unbearable. She never did, though she was imprisoned and became desperately ill. Writing in his *War Memoirs* of her ordeal—which was his ordeal too because he loved her—Beneš says: "We were ready for whatever might befall. Every great and righteous cause demands sacrifices and they must be made resolutely, without sentimentality. And every sacrifice thus made will cost one's opponents very dear."

A few weeks after he had sent his telegram from Zürich, a code advertisement in a Prague newspaper which reached him in Paris told Beneš of his wife's arrest. Curiously enough, it was not her husband's flight which caused it but the capture of a courier *en route* from

Masaryk to the Maffia. But Beneš did not know this at the time. Nor did he hear the details of her trial and imprisonment until she herself told him in Paris some time after the armistice in 1918. But he was able to record with great and natural pride in his *War Memoirs* that the publicity given to Hana Beneš's sufferings "rendered valuable services to the propagation of our cause".

Masaryk's first preoccupation when Beneš reached Geneva was "Who is going to take your place in the Maffia?" He even wanted Beneš to go back to Prague again to make more satisfactory liaison arrangements between Prague and Geneva before leaving Austria-Hungary for good. Beneš pointed out that his return meant absolutely certain arrest, but added that he was quite ready to go if Masaryk insisted. Masaryk, after sleeping on his idea, found it a bad one. Instead, he decided on a division of labours. Masaryk, with his English connections, would make London his headquarters; Beneš, with his intimate knowledge of France, should go to Paris. Switzerland was to be left to a school friend of Beneš's, Dr. Sychrava, who would be responsible for keeping in touch with Prague.

And so, in the end, it was arranged. But Dr. Sychrava's first attempt to communicate with Prague nearly brought irreparable disaster. His courier was caught and wholesale arrests of the Maffia-ists followed, Masaryk's daughter Alice and Hana Beneš among them. It was the first time the police had got on to the track of the Maffia as an organization, though many individuals belonging to it had been put in prison—a number of them had been

discovered when trying to leave the country as Beneš had done. That the Maffia survived the rounding-up of so many of its leading members is a remarkable tribute both to its organizers' skill and the patriotism which pervaded the whole movement. Equally remarkable is the fact that it succeeded in evading detection again until a few days before the war ended, although it was in regular touch with Masaryk and Beneš throughout this whole period. It was not till October 21, 1918, that the Austrian police found themselves in possession of enough evidence against the Maffia to shoot the lot. But by that time the Austrian police were in far greater danger of being shot than the Maffia-ists. Exactly a week later, on October 28th, at seven o'clock in the evening, a proclamation was issued in Prague which began as follows: "The independent Czechoslovak State has come into being."

But in the first week of September 1915 it must have needed the optimism of Bruce's spider to think it worth while persevering with the task Masaryk, Beneš, and Sychrava cheerfully allotted themselves in their conference at Geneva. There they were, a set of impecunious conspirators in self-imposed exile, heading a heterogeneous handful of Austrian subjects, who for one reason or another were exempt from military service in the Austrian army, and pitting themselves against an empire. On paper they had about as much chance as the proverbial snowball. Lack of political relations between Prague and foreign countries, wrote Masaryk years later, when the seeming impossible had been triumphantly achieved, "obliged us to start the work abroad from the

very foundations".¹ They had even to teach the chancelleries of Europe who the Czechs were and who the Slovaks. Diplomats had heard vaguely of Bohemia and Moravia and no doubt, if they were British, also of John Hus. But to most of the Western world—a small group of students and of course the Czech colonists excepted—the inhabitants of these provinces were merely Austrians. I remember some time before the war when I was in Switzerland meeting a girl called Gertrude Blaha who told me she came from Prague. It was not till after peace was signed and the name of Czechoslovakia spread itself across the map of Europe that I realized she must have been a Czech. I thought of her merely as an Austrian. There is a certain Czech diplomat who stoutly maintained up to the time of the Sudeten crisis in the summer of 1938 that many English and American people believed the word "Czechoslovakia" to be an obscure form of disease. Even if he was right then, which I very much doubt, they certainly are wiser now. But when Masaryk, Beneš, and the Maffia started their crusade, English and American ignorance on the subject was little short of abysmal. And one has to admit that as late as the Sudeten crisis in 1938 an English Prime Minister could speak of the Czechs as "people of whom we know nothing".

What, then, were the crusaders' assets in 1915? First of all their unquenchable enthusiasm and the selfless devotion of those who were bearing the burden and heat of the day in Prague. Then there were the Czech prisoners of war in the hands of the Allies, mostly name-

¹ *The Making of a State.*

less patriots who at the risk of their lives had deserted from the Austrian army in order to bear arms on the other side—only to find themselves treated with grave suspicion as probable Austrian spies by the majority of War Offices. Next come the emigrants, some 2,000,000 of whom had left their native hearths before the war while still retaining their Czech or Slovak patriotism. In Paris, London, Rome, Petrograd, as well as Geneva; in the United States, in Canada, in South America these Czech and Slovak colonists were all potential helpers in the cause which the conspirators in Geneva had taken upon themselves to organize.

With unerring instinct, Masaryk and Beneš saw that the road to their goal of national freedom lay in proving to the Allied Governments that the Czechs and the Slovaks could be useful. It was no good their merely appealing to the Allies' better nature or descanting on the theme of how useful the Czechs could be at some future date. They had to be in a position to prove that the Czechs were useful already, and induce the Allies to take advantage of the facilities the Czech independence movement could offer for the task of breaking the Central Powers' resistance. They were almost instantaneously successful and in this way they were able to build steadily on the sure foundation of results already achieved until, snowball fashion, they had constructed the whole edifice of their dreams. They never hurried. Convinced, as Lord Kitchener was, that it would be a long war they played each card in their hand after making sure they could establish it. Above all, they never tried to run before they could walk.

BENEŠ OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In accordance with the arrangement made at Geneva on September 4, 1915—the day after Beneš escaped from Austria—Masaryk and Beneš met in Paris on September 16th. They stayed together till the end of the month arranging, discussing, organizing, getting into touch with the Czech colony and a little group of French sympathizers. By that time Masaryk felt he could safely leave his youthful aide-de-camp to his own devices and take up work in London as he had planned.

Before going he introduced Beneš to his friend, Professor Denis, the distinguished scholar and author, who edited *La Nation Tchèque* and whose advice and help were invaluable to Beneš throughout the war period. Masaryk also instructed the considerable Czech colony in Paris to co-operate with Beneš, which it did in the end, though some of its members were a little jealous of him right up to the end of the war.

Beneš set to work with his usual mixture of caution and audacity. He approached nobody in authority—even if they were old acquaintances—unless there was a good reason for doing so and unless he felt the benefits of the meeting would be mutual. And he was careful not to ask for favours. His rôle was to offer service.

He found that most of his old student friends of ten years ago had either been sent to the front or had forgotten him. Some of the professors at the Sorbonne still remembered him and he also had contacts among the French Socialists through having contributed to their periodicals. Among the latter was Albert Thomas, who was then in the Ministry of Munitions, and who after the war made for himself an international reputation as

first Director of the International Labour Office at Geneva. Among the professors was Professor Louis Eisenmann who had known Beneš at Dijon and who has since written a valuable little psychological study of his old friend and pupil.

Beneš found to his delight that Professor Eisenmann, as an expert on Austro-Hungarian affairs, had joined the Information Department of the French War Office. Even then Beneš waited a whole fortnight before going to see him. When at last he did go, it was not to ask Eisenmann's help in obtaining freedom for the Czechs and Slovaks but to offer him the help of the Czech Independence Movement in obtaining information about Austria-Hungary. Eisenmann was delighted. He had been reading all the Austrian newspapers he could lay his hands on and badly needed somebody with up-to-date local knowledge who could comment intelligently on what he had read. He took Beneš round to the War Ministry, where Beneš further found that the officials were anxious to do something to counter Austrian activity in Switzerland. Beneš told them of Dr. Sychrava who was already busy fighting Austrian propaganda and espionage in that country, adding that he could also promise the help of the Maffia if the French on their side could arrange the necessary contacts with Prague. The War Ministry jumped at the idea. And so within one month of Beneš's arrival in Paris as a nonentity he had established himself as a useful link for the French in their prosecution of the war. Thereafter it was through Beneš that the French Government got a large part of its news of Austro-Hungarian affairs and it was through him that the Maffia

became an important agency in French efforts to break Austria-Hungary's resistance. In return Beneš obtained the help of the French Secret Service in keeping the Maffia supplied with authentic news of what was going on in the Allied countries, thus enabling it to counteract the false rumours put into circulation by the Austrian authorities. It is not too much to say that without this supply of information on which to re-kindle the fires of its first enthusiasm, the Maffia could scarcely have maintained its cohesion during the long years in which its goal seemed to get farther and farther away.

Having established himself with the War Ministry through Professor Eisenmann, Beneš turned his attention to Albert Thomas, who was then only an under-secretary but was soon to be the Minister of Munitions. In his case results were not so speedy nor were the benefits altogether mutual. But the contact ultimately turned out to be of the utmost importance, for Thomas afterwards organized a special committee in France for the protection of the oppressed nationalities. This committee propagandized extensively in the Allied countries and helped considerably in building up public opinion in favour of the smaller nationalities of Europe.

Meanwhile, the moment was fast approaching for the Czechs to come out into the open in their fight against the Habsburg monarchy. Among the documents Beneš had brought with him from Prague was a manifesto, agreed upon in solemn conclave by the Maffia, declaring war on Austria-Hungary. Masaryk and Beneš and Sychrava at their conference in Geneva decided to keep this document up their sleeves for the time being. The freedom

movement was scarcely born then and certainly had not reached the age of being able to speak. To have thundered defiance at such a moment would merely have made their movement and themselves look ridiculous. But already by November 1915—only two months afterwards—the shape of things to come was growing quite discernible. The indefatigable labours of Masaryk and Beneš respectively in London and Paris had in this short space of time welded the scattered Czech colonists and patriots in the two hemispheres into something which could without unduly stretching the imagination be called an Independence Movement, complete with the dignity of capital letters.

So Beneš, on Masaryk's instructions, pulled the Maffia's manifesto out of its pigeon-hole. Before publishing it he took the precaution of going through it with Professor Denis, who declared it to be both badly drafted and lacking in conciseness. Between them they revised it with Masaryk's consent and the consent of the Czech National Unions in America and Russia. Finally, on Sunday, November 14, 1915, the world learned that the Czech nation was officially at war with the Habsburg Empire.

The world took this epoch-making act with not unnatural calm, seeing that for the most part it heard of the Czechs for the first time. Indeed, according to Beneš, there was only one newspaper, the *Journal des Débats*, which paid serious attention to the declaration. All the other newspapers either ignored it or, what was equally galling, misread its significance. The declaration was signed by an organization calling itself the Czechoslovak

Foreign Committee which Masaryk and Beneš brought into being off their own bat specially for the purpose of declaring war. There was a good deal of competition for the honour of belonging to this Committee and thus signing this first official manifesto of the new—indeed, unborn—State, and Beneš had to be decidedly tactful in placating unsuccessful claimants. Even if, as Beneš himself admits, "the immediate effect was not considerable", the occasion and the document were destined to become historic. They were the first faint signs of the travail which preceded the birth of the State of Czechoslovakia.

As one of the leaders of a State *in posse* officially at war with an Empire, Beneš now felt himself entitled to an office. When he arrived in Paris in September he had rented a small room on the fifth floor of a house in the Rue Léopold Robert for which he paid the large sum of 120 francs a month—no less than £4 at the then rate of exchange. He was away in London, Geneva, and Lausanne for the month following the Czechoslovak declaration of war, but on his return on December 12th he appointed a secretary, bought an old second-hand typewriter, and turned his one room into a bureau.

His chief occupation as head of the Bureau of the Czechoslovak Foreign Committee was to issue propaganda. How he managed to find time for it is a mystery. He was out and about most of the twenty-four hours of every day, organizing, discussing, bargaining, persuading, lecturing. Yet somehow or other he still found time to write. It must be admitted, however, that in these respects he was no more than a good second to Masaryk, who, in spite of his sixty-five years, was at one and the

same time leader and organizer of a revolutionary movement, professor in the University of London, editor of one periodical and contributor to many others,¹ and who, nevertheless, never let a day pass without entering up his diary, reading a novel, and doing his Sokol exercises.

The day after he established his Bureau, Beneš renewed his acquaintance with Dr. Milan Štefánik,² who next to Masaryk and Beneš played the greatest part in bringing Czechoslovakia into being. Štefánik, like Masaryk, was a Slovak, but unlike Masaryk he came from Slovakia proper, which was under Hungarian instead of Austrian rule. When war broke out he was studying astronomy in France. He became a French citizen, enlisted in the flying corps, went to the Serbian front, and suddenly turned up again in Paris as though from nowhere on December 13, 1915.

Štefánik had grandiose ideas of how to promote the Czechoslovak cause. He was an emotional fellow who occasionally embarrassed Masaryk by calling him "Little Father", and wanting to kiss and caress him. He had a lion's heart in a body which was all too frequently suffering torture. The three of them soon became firm friends. Štefánik's greatest contribution to the formation of the Czechoslovak State was to build up an army out of prisoners of war and emigrants. He was killed in a flying accident shortly after the war and his people have honoured his memory by erecting a huge mausoleum

¹ Including a weekly article for the *Sunday Times*, and numerous articles in the *Nation*, *Spectator*, and *New Europe*.

² They had first met in Paris as fellow-students in 1905.

near the spot in the Carpathian mountains where he crashed. From now on we shall necessarily hear a good deal of Dr.—afterwards General—Štefánik.

The first effect of Beneš's meeting with Štefánik was to double the amount of work he had to do. Masaryk was to come to Paris toward the end of January 1916 and Beneš and Štefánik were planning a big Press campaign in connection with this visit. Štefánik had to go into hospital for an operation so that the whole burden and heat of the day fell on Beneš. It was Štefánik, however, and not Beneš who arranged for Masaryk to meet the famous Aristide Briand. The interview had momentous results. Indeed it may be said that Masaryk's exposition to Briand of the Czechoslovak case on February 3, 1916, proved to the Allies that the existence of an independent Czechoslovakia was vital to the safety of France and England. Bismarck's dictum that Bohemia is the navel of Europe has already been quoted.¹ Bismarck also said that who controlled Bohemia controlled Europe, just as Schiller's Wallenstein declared that Bohemia was "a stone in the way" of Germany's path eastwards. Masaryk explained to Briand why this was so on that fateful day of February 3, 1916, and convinced him that it was a vital interest for France to establish and maintain an independent Czechoslovakia.

Beneš, of course, was convinced already. For good or ill, during Masaryk's lifetime and after Masaryk had passed away, he stuck unswervingly to the policy of reliance on France and opposition to German militarism (though not to Germany) right down to the dark days

¹ See page 10.

when those whom he believed must for their own safety's sake be ever Czechoslovakia's friends turned suddenly on her and forced her to surrender to Germany districts which had been part of Bohemia for a thousand years. Not only so, Czechoslovakia's friends and not the Germans drove the Czechs out of lines of fortifications which France and England had urged them to build and which had cost from first to last not less than £60,000,000. It was easy (until Germany overran Poland) to assert that Beneš should much earlier have persuaded his country to make terms with its powerful neighbour, and that if he had done so the Sudeten lands would still be part of Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovakia itself would never have lost its independence even temporarily. But the fact remains that he and Masaryk were temperamentally and by their training drawn towards the West rather than towards the North and East; that the Czechs had close on three hundred bitter reasons for disliking and distrusting the Germans—they were under Germanic domination from 1620 to 1918.

Nevertheless, and this is fundamental, Beneš has constantly maintained that he and Masaryk always did everything in their power to come to an agreement with Germany in collaboration with and with the consent of France and England, while remaining faithful to their promises to these countries and avoiding any step that could provoke the impression that they were preparing to betray their Allies and friends.

Moreover, not only Masaryk and Beneš, but the Czechs as a nation, were democrats and have managed to keep their democratic faith in spite of the Munich disaster of

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September 1938, when they lost their means of defence, and in spite of the still more ghastly tragedy of March 1939, when the inevitable sequel to Munich happened and Czechoslovakia was ruthlessly dissected. Nazi ideology was and is abhorrent to them. Beneš therefore had no difficulty in persuading his countrymen that self-interest as well as a sense of comradeship born of mutual sacrifices and co-operation during the World War united the democracies of France and England and the only Danubian democracy in bonds of friendship which would stand even the supreme test of war. We can see now that Beneš underestimated the power of hostile propaganda, the effect of the arrival of new actors on the political stage, the sense of security engendered in the French mind by the Maginot line, the discouraging potency of Hitler's Siegfried line, and Goering's air force. Nor did he fully gauge either the depth of the feeling in Britain that the Czechs ought never to have been given the Sudetenland, or the dead weight of the isolationist tradition on British foreign policy. Moreover, as an expert in the conduct of foreign affairs, he made the mistake of assuming that the hands at the helm in London and Paris were as skilful as his own.

Even so, no one could have foretold the sudden *volte-face* of British policy which one day declared the Czech Government had gone as far as could be reasonably expected when it offered autonomy to the Sudetens, and within a week propounded a plan for handing the whole area over to Germany. And if Beneš was at fault in trusting his Western friends, as events certainly proved, they were

much more to blame, for they never gave him the warning that their affections were waning though he constantly asked them to do so. His tragic trustfulness, however inexcusable in a statesman, is therefore manifestly more becoming to him as a man than is the behaviour of those who let him down.

The Briand-Masaryk interview of February 1916 had such momentous consequences both during the war and during the years that followed that it is worth while going a little out of our way to hear just what Masaryk said to Briand. Beneš, after all, is Masaryk's political heir as well as his ardent disciple, and Masaryk's views therefore provide a reliable key to the policy which Beneš followed until its collapse brought about his political downfall.

Masaryk did not bother Briand with any sob-stuff about the wrongs the Czechs and Slovaks had suffered and were suffering under Austria and Hungary respectively. He knew that these wrongs were a side-issue so far as the French nation was concerned. What mattered to the French was whether or not it was a vital French interest to help the Czechs and Slovaks gain and keep their independence. Accordingly, Masaryk stressed the fact that the Kaiser was dreaming of an empire stretching at least from Berlin to Baghdad. He showed that the control which pan-German imperialism exercised over the smaller nationalities of Europe through the Habsburg Empire made this dream a realizable possibility instead of a vain chimera. Through Austria-Hungary pan-Germanism was already not far from the Black Sea, and unless Central Europe was reorganized the Berlin-Baghdad line would

soon have no gaps in it whatever. Reorganization, Masaryk added, should take the form of liberating the oppressed nationalities, the Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Rumanians, Poles. It meant, of course, the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but it also meant the establishment of an effective series of obstacles to pan-Germanism.

Briand was impressed. Hitherto, French policy had been built on the theory that Austria-Hungary ought to be preserved as a unity. This was a theory held at one time by many Czechs, who inherited it from the reply of the Czech patriot František Palacký when he was asked to help organize the 1848 revolution two years before Masaryk was born. Palacký declared: "You necessarily intend to weaken Austria as an independent empire beyond recovery, indeed to make Austria impossible—a State whose preservation, integrity, and the strengthening of which is and must be a great and important matter not only for my people but for all Europe, indeed for humanity and civilization."¹

The Palacký policy, however, was based on rebuilding the Austro-Hungarian Empire on a federal basis with a self-governing Bohemia as one of its component parts. The sixty-six years from 1848 to the World War did not bring Austria-Hungary much nearer to this goal. Indeed, as Masaryk and Beneš saw it, the rise of pan-Germanism during this period seemed destined ultimately to rivet more firmly than ever the chains which bound the smaller nationalities of Central Europe. Yet if before the war

¹ Quoted from *Czechs and Germans*, by Elizabeth Wiskemann. Oxford University Press.

there could have been evolved a Danubian Federation in which the oppressed nationalities were the equals instead of the subjects of Austria and Hungary, it is unquestionable that the Kaiser's Berlin-Baghdad dream of empire could scarcely have been formulated and the World War which grew out of the oppression of the smaller nationalities by Austria-Hungary would never have happened. And if federation could have been achieved after the war, *Anschluss* of Austria and Germany would never have happened. Federation was impossible before the war because Austrians and Hungarians were top-dogs and did not want to give up their privileged position; it was impossible after the war because they were under-dogs and could not reconcile themselves to the fact. If and when top- and under-dog realize that equality is their best policy, there may still be a Danubian Federation one of these days, though possibly without Austria and probably with a somewhat different Czechoslovakia from the one forged with tears of blood during the World War. It goes without saying that Beneš as Masaryk's political executor would welcome a Danubian Federation on a democratic basis. Both Beneš and Masaryk as practising democrats stood for equality of race as well as of individual. It is a fact that has been lost sight of during the critical struggle between the Czechs and the Sudeten, Polish, and Hungarian minorities. But it is true nevertheless.

Palacký's desire to keep the Habsburg Empire intact was due to a fear of Russia. Masaryk and Beneš, on the other hand, feared Russia not at all. Nor did they want to lean on it because both of them knew too much about

Russia's inherent weakness. During their campaign for Czechoslovak independence they constantly found themselves up against the Russo-phils in the movement. Many prominent members of the Maffia pinned their whole faith on Russia and disapproved of the Masaryk-Beneš-Štefánik outlook which was first and last though not quite all the time directed toward the West. The result was several intrigues by the Russian Foreign Office to wrest the leadership of the Czech independence movement from Masaryk. These intrigues came to a head in August 1916, about six months after the Briand-Masaryk interview, when the Russian Foreign Office nominated a rival leader of the movement. As there were not only many Czech colonists in Russia, but some fifty thousand Czech prisoners of war as well, this defection was potentially very serious. The situation was saved by the Kerensky revolution, when the malcontents were gradually brought back to heel. But Masaryk and Štefánik both had to go to Russia before the situation was saved, thus greatly increasing Beneš's responsibilities in Paris.

In view of Beneš's contacts with the Russian revolutionaries during his student days in Paris, it might have been expected that the Kerensky movement would have made him change his mind about the value of Russia. Actually it did nothing of the sort, although he has often been accused of leanings not merely toward Russia but toward Bolshevism. Later, as architect of the Czech-Russian Pact of 1935, he was to come in for serious criticism in this connection.¹

¹ The reader will notice frequent indications of Beneš's Western bias in the ensuing pages. One in particular may be mentioned here:

But it is time to leave these achronistic digressions and get back to February 1916. Masaryk came away from his talk with Briand justifiably elated. He told Beneš, and Beneš duly recorded the fact in his next secret report to the Maffia, that Briand had said: "I assure you that France will not forget your aspirations which we share, and we shall do everything in order that the Czechs may obtain their independence." Beneš added Masaryk's own enthusiastic comment: "We have France entirely on our side." His own more cautious estimate was that Masaryk's stay in Paris was a landmark in the history of the Czechoslovak revolutionary movement.

With encouraging support also forthcoming from official circles in England, the Masaryk-Beneš-Štefánik triumvirate felt that the moment had arrived to replace the Czechoslovak Foreign Committee which had audaciously declared war on Austria-Hungary by something a little more imposing. After long consideration they chose the title "National Council of the Czech Lands". It is worth mentioning that it was Štefánik, the Slovak member of the triumvirate, who advocated leaving out any reference to Slovakia in the official title. Štefánik's reason was that he did not want to make things too complicated for the man-in-the-street. It is a fair deduction that he had no objection to the Czechs being regarded as the senior partner in the firm. In view of the esteem in which Štefánik's memory is held in Slovakia this is a point to be remembered, because later on rather deep cleavages of opinion developed in after years as to the respective his insistence that the Czech-Russian Pact should not come into force until the Czech-French Pact was in operation. See page 219.

rights and duties of Czechs and Slovaks in their joint patrimony.

The new National Council of the Czech Lands,¹ constituted in February 1916, was a somewhat amorphous body whose members were scattered over four or five countries. But it had a permanent secretariat in Paris with Beneš as General Secretary. One of its main duties was to impress the Allied Governments and their public opinion that the Czech independence movement was something to be reckoned with. The formation of this secretariat, therefore, brought Beneš out of his little bed-sitting-room-office on the fifth floor in the Rue Léopold Robert and established him in more imposing quarters in the Rue Bonaparte. From here, Beneš superintended the growing activities of the movement, served as an intermediary for news, kept in touch with the *émigrés*, issued instructions, and carried out the plans of Masaryk and Štefánik for organizing the prisoners of war and volunteers who afterwards became the Czech National Army and the spear-head of the independence movement. The vast majority of the National Army were originally deserters from the Austro-Hungarian forces—the entire Third Prague Regiment had gone over to the Russians in April 1915, being preceded and followed by many others until by 1916 there were 50,000 Czech “prisoners” in Russia alone. Some 25,000 Czechs deserted to the Serbians, but after the terrible rigours of the Serbian army’s retreat to the sea across Albania only 4,000 of them were sufficiently fit to be sent to France and organized into the nucleus of a fighting force. About

¹ Hereafter called the National Council.

20,000 more escaped into Italy, but many of them also were in too pitiable a condition to be immediately available. Those in Russia were caught by the Bolshevik Revolution and finally fought their way out across Siberia, coming home via Vladivostok just in time to make themselves very useful to the new Czechoslovak State when it was trying to consolidate itself in the early days after the war ended.

But in February 1916 there was something even more immediately important to think about than the formation of a Czech army. The organization of the national movement itself needed to be brought into some sort of order, and this task mostly fell to Beneš. Each of the Czech colonies abroad had its own self-governing body which owed no allegiance to anybody. Some of the local groups, notably those in Russia, were not at first disposed to accept the authority of the National Council. With the American colonists, who numbered anything up to 1,500,000, the new Secretariat and its little-known Secretary-General also had a good deal of trouble. One difficulty Beneš had to cope with was the exuberant tendency of the local leaders to dive into the sea of high politics. Carried away by the National Council's Declaration of War they tried other declarations on their own behalf, including the deposition of the Emperor Francis Joseph and the establishment of a Czechoslovak Republic.

Such ebullitions were, of course, for the National Council as a whole to suppress. Beneš himself, however, had special troubles of his own. Many people were jealous of him; others were critical of his youth and political inexperience; not a few deliberately tried to get

him removed from office. Even in Paris, where Masaryk's own authority was unquestioned, the Czech colonists were not at first prepared to accept his nominee to the post of Secretary-General. Beneš took no notice of their efforts to unseat him. He went steadily about his own and the National Council's business, and left the Paris colony as much as possible to its own devices.

The truth was, as Beneš realized, that the Paris colony was fortunately concerning itself with affairs which the march of time was gradually reducing to matters of detail and routine. It had made itself responsible for such questions as the welfare of the seven hundred Czech volunteers in the French Foreign Legion, the performance of consular functions, and appeals for funds. Beneš left them to get on with minor issues of this kind. He knew that as the influence of the National Council grew, more weighty matters would claim its attention. While the colony busied itself with the individual volunteers the National Council gradually lifted them out of the obscurity which was perforce theirs as a mere cog in the vast French military machine and gave them a separate entity as nucleus of a National Army. The National Council similarly won new duties and responsibilities to enhance the importance of the consular functions which the Paris colonists were performing. It superintended the spending of the money the colonists were so indefatigable and, be it added, so successful in raising. In all this business, Masaryk was Zeus on Olympus while Beneš was Mercury fulfilling the indispensable task of intermediary between Zeus and the other Olympians of the National Council as well as between the Council and the ordinary

mortals of the Czech colonial system. Štefánik, though excellent in the rôle of Mars, was too excitable to deal successfully with the colonists even if he had wanted to, which he did not. Moreover both he and Masaryk were more often away from than in Paris.

So Beneš with full support both from Masaryk and Štefánik and unselfish help from Masaryk's daughter, Olga, had the otherwise thankless task of go-between. At first he had no responsibility for political activities which were handled exclusively by Masaryk in London. But in 1917, when Masaryk went to Russia (and narrowly missed being killed in the Bolshevik Revolution), control of political matters was transferred to the Paris Secretariat and they were henceforward dealt with personally by Beneš.

So, under the guiding hand of its Secretary-General, the work of the National Council gradually emerged from the chaos and darkness of its first beginnings into the order and light of an organized movement. Its activities grouped themselves naturally under four main heads: the relation of the local colonies to the central organization; dissemination of propaganda for the Czech cause; work among the Czech prisoners of war and the volunteers in the Allied Armies; political and diplomatic work. The foundations thus laid endured right through the war down to the time when the exiled National Council gave triumphant place to a National Government established in the historic capital of the Czech homelands. Looked at from any point of view it was a stupendous achievement and for his share of it, which was as big as anybody's, Beneš deserves well of his country. The formation of the Maffia, the establish-

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ment of contact between the Maffia and the Czech colonists and exiles, the formation of the Foreign Committee and the National Council were all in large measure the work of Beneš. Within five months of his flight into Switzerland and three of his settling in Paris, the infant Czech Independence Movement had taken definite shape not only in the minds of its parents, but in the eyes of the world. Travail had begun.

Birth Throes

THE NEXT STAGE in the birth of the new State involved Beneš in much unobtrusive planning for the future with very little present reward to show for it.

Regulating the respective spheres of the National Council and the local colonists occupied him throughout almost the whole of 1916 and the early part of 1917. During this time he paid several visits to London, to Rome, to Geneva, to Zürich, organizing Press bureaux and developing the diplomatic and political activities of the Czech independence movement in these centres. It was a period in which foundation-building displaced the rather spectacular growth of the first few months.

It was also a period of great anxiety. The war had developed into a long stalemate in the West while, in the East, Russia was showing unmistakable signs of impending collapse.

Through these long and difficult days, Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik plodded steadily on, never losing their faith in ultimate victory. They fought tooth and nail against defeatism, against attempts on the part of France and Great Britain to make an inconclusive peace. They received in due time the reward of those who are patient and faithful. And in the end triumph came before they expected it.

For two and a half years, the three musketeers were constantly on the move. Štefánik, unsparing of his fragile constitution, rushed to and fro between France, England, the United States, and Russia. Masaryk, ignoring his mounting tale of years, also went to Russia, travelling prudently as Thomas George Marsden, ignorant of the fact that his London laundry had thoughtfully marked one of his collars with his real name written in indelible ink. For the first time in his life and much to his disgust Masaryk had to have a valet. He has also left it on record that he had to work even harder in Russia than in England, and that, as we have seen, is quite a lot. Owing to the Bolshevik Revolution, he was unable to come back as he had gone, through Scandinavia, and had to make his way across Siberia and so home via America. He did not get back to Europe till after the Armistice. By that time he was President of a brand-new Republic.

The absences of Masaryk and Štefánik from the chief zone of operations, which was Europe and more particularly Paris, threw chief responsibility as midwife for the unborn Czechoslovak State on to the shoulders of Beneš during the greater part of the two and a half years between the formation of the National Council and the actual birth of the new State. It was because his two superiors¹ were so often away that Beneš, in addition to his propaganda and organizing activities as Secretary-General of the National Council, gradually assumed the lion's share of the diplomatic work, thus gaining the

¹ For a time there was a third: Dr. Dürich, Vice-President of the National Council, but he was dismissed for opposing Masaryk's authority.

experience and status which were to stand him in such good stead in after years.

During the greater part of this formative period, Beneš lived on, student fashion, in his one room in the Rue Léopold Robert. He got his own breakfast, lunched and supped for a franc and a half at a little restaurant in the same street. His personal funds were running low, so he eked them out by writing for Czech newspapers published in America. In addition he supplied regular information—but not for payment—to the French Ministry of War and several French dailies. At the start the French newspapers very seldom published anything he sent them. But later on, thanks in part to introductions provided by Štefánik, who was a French citizen, he got into close touch with a number of influential writers, and before long papers like *Le Temps*, *Paris Midi*, and the *Journal des Débats* were publishing substantial articles about the Czech national cause, based principally on information supplied by Beneš.

Early in 1916, Štefánik transferred to the French Air Force, and this brought him into contact with a number of society folk. Finding that many of these were of the type that never trusts the newspapers, Beneš and Štefánik tickled their vanity by preparing confidential memoranda for their private use. The recipients thought they were getting exclusive news and were correspondingly proud to be able to pass it on to friends. Actually it was only the memoranda which were exclusive. The contents were mere variations on the one theme. The harmless subterfuge served a useful purpose in spreading information about the Czech cause though it must have taxed

Beneš's patience not less than his ingenuity trying to dress his facts up in different ways for his growing clientèle.

Generally Beneš kept himself in the background in all activities of this kind. He much preferred to get natives of the Allied countries to write about the Czech national movement. Men like Wickham Steed and Seton-Watson in England, Professor E. Denis and L. Eisenmann in France, A. Bonnard and E. Chapuis in Switzerland, Professor Milyukov (who was soon to be Foreign Minister) in Russia, Senator Albertini and Professor Borghese of the *Corriere della Sera* in Italy, as well as Senator Scialoja, the economist, were all active in this connection.

Under Beneš's direction were a number of Press bureaux, some of which he started and the remainder reorganized. There was, in addition, the Slav Press Bureau in New York which distributed bulletins to some five hundred daily papers throughout America and acted as an information centre for people who wanted to know something about the Czechs and Central Europe generally. There is some reason for believing—as Beneš himself does—that it was the activities of the Slav Press Bureau which caused Senator Kenyon of Iowa to bring forward a resolution advocating an independent Czechoslovak State in May 1917, soon after the United States entered the war. One of the biggest assets of this bureau from the propaganda point of view was the exploits of the Czech army which fought its way out of Russia across Siberia after the Bolshevik Revolution. American newspapers were all eager for news of this romantic adventure in which General Syrový, the national hero, who became Prime

Minister twenty-odd years later during the Sudeten crisis, lost an eye, and gained a reputation. Next to the Siberian anabasis, the star attraction in America was Masaryk himself. When he went to Chicago in May 1918 he was welcomed by a crowd numbering over one hundred thousand, by no means all of whom were Czech emigrants.

The headquarters of the national movement in London were in a small office in the Strand. In addition there was a Press bureau which was actually started by Masaryk, though Beneš was largely responsible for its organization and paid several visits to London in this connection. One of his ventures in London was to rent a shop window looking out on Piccadilly Circus. Here Beneš and his assistants tried their hands at window-dressing and what might almost be called display-advertising, giving thousands of passers-by a daily opportunity to learn something about Czechoslovakia. There were maps, statistics, and diagrams for the studious and photographs and pictures for the not-so-studious.

Beneš's trips to London were not altogether the happiest experiences of his wartime activities. For one thing, the only route by which civilians were allowed to travel was via Havre—Southampton, and poor Beneš was the worst sailor imaginable. Another reason was that he was suspected by Scotland Yard of being a spy. He had got rid of that forged passport which had made Masaryk angry in Geneva and in its place had procured an authentic Serbian one. Scotland Yard couldn't make this passport—or Beneš—out. They could not catch him out either, though they tried. In the end Wickham Steed rescued him from the police, though not from sea-sickness.

"Beneš, whom I saw whenever he came, never complained", Steed writes in his autobiography *Through Thirty Years*, "and I might not have known of his difficulties had not a Scotland Yard inspector attached to the British Passport office at Havre taken me aside in January 1917 and whispered:

" 'Do you know anything about a fellow who calls himself Beenees, sir? We don't like him. We know he is an Austrian, yet he comes through here, from time to time, with a Serbian passport. How can an Austrian be a Serbian? He is very mysterious and we have put a black mark against him. Whenever he turns up, though his papers seem to be in order, we run him in for a bit, so as to make him miss his boat. But we have not yet been able to catch him out.' "

"I felt it would be hopeless to explain to this worthy detective the intricacies of Austrian politics, and how an 'Austrian' might be in possession of a Serbian passport. So I said:

" 'My dear Inspector, Beenees is a very important man. He is a friend of mine, and is straight as a die. You had better not run him in any more. Before very long, that fellow may be signing passports which you will have to respect; and then he may tell our Government that a certain Scotland Yard inspector at Havre is a nuisance and ought to be removed. So treat him kindly.' "

"Thereafter, 'Beenees' suffered no more, in a British 'quod' at Havre,¹ from sea-sickness deferred. He became friends with the vigilant inspector, whom he rather

¹ Beneš, in *My War Memoirs* (page 503), locates this episode at Southampton.

admired for taking no risks in the case of suspected enemy aliens."

In Italy, where the problem of sea-sickness fortunately did not arise, Beneš had to contend with difficulties of a different kind. Not only was there no Czechoslovak colony to provide the initial impetus for Czechoslovak propaganda, but the whole movement was under some suspicion. Italy, thanks to the secret Treaty of London which brought her into the war, had claims on Dalmatia which brought her into conflict with the Croats, who, as Austro-Hungarian citizens, were working in close sympathy with the Czech national movement.

Consequently it was not till April 1918 that the Italian campaign really began to show results. In this month, following a Congress of the Oppressed Nationalities held in Rome, Beneš fathered the establishment of an Italo-Czech League to develop cultural relations between the two peoples. So successful was it that a number of Italians actually served in the Czech Army which the patient work of Masaryk, Štefánik, and Beneš brought into being at about the same time.¹

Formation of a Czech National Army was, of course, the next objective after the initial step in establishing a central National Council. As early as February 1915, before Beneš had left Prague, Masaryk had decided, and put it on record in writing, that an army would give the Czechs "a new juridical status as regards Austria and the Allies. . . . This (he went on) will create a political situation enabling us to attain at least our minimum demands when peace is negotiated. In any case, neither

¹ See pages 104 sqq.

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the Allies nor Vienna will be able to pass us by in silence if we have soldiers. . . . Without a decisive and military struggle we shall obtain nothing from anybody."

It was not till the spring of 1916 that an opportunity occurred to develop this idea. At that time France was suffering heavy losses and had appealed to Russia to send four hundred thousand troops to the French front. Russia agreed, but actually not more than ten thousand of them ever arrived. The National Council seized its chance and suggested that the Czech prisoners-of-war in Russia should be sent to France instead. Hence, in part, the visits of Štefánik and, later on, of Masaryk to Russia. Beneš in Paris got into touch with the Russian military attaché and through him with the Russian Ambassador. The scheme so interested the French authorities that in June 1916 Beneš for the first time was granted an audience with the Political Director of the French Foreign Office as Secretary-General of the National Council. This constituted official recognition for that body and is another landmark in the embryonic progress of the Czechoslovak State. From that time on, Beneš was to all intents and purposes treated as a Foreign Minister, though he did not actually acquire the title deeds of that office until October 1918.

For various reasons, of which the German submarine campaign was one and the Bolshevik Revolution another, only a small part of the Czech army from Russia ever reached France. The remainder fought their historic way out of Russia across Siberia—a feat which military experts say surpasses that of Xenophon and his ten thousand Greeks in their anabasis from the heart of

Asia Minor. But the mere fact that the Czechs in Russia were for a time regarded as the nucleus of a valuable accession of strength for the stricken French Army enhanced the value of the Czech prisoners-of-war and volunteers who were already available in the West.

For some time, however, Beneš and his corps of propagandists had great difficulty in convincing the French authorities that Czech prisoners were different from any other prisoners. In process of time they evolved a special technique. First they asked for permission to send Czech literature to the prison camps, then to supply clean linen, writing materials, and books. Next they asked for the Czech prisoners to be separated from the others and to be placed under the control of Czech officers. Finally they requested leave to carry on recruiting propaganda.

They said nothing at all up to this point, be it noted, about forming a national army. The recruits were presumably to join the Czech volunteers in the French Foreign Legion. The question of the National Army had to wait until the National Council had its political feet on firm ground: in other words until its Secretary-General—thanks to the determination with which Czech soldiers deserted *en masse* from the Austro-Hungarian army—had had that official audience with the Political Director at the Quai d'Orsay in June 1916.

Even so, Beneš had to walk warily. The Czech prisoners in France were not under the jurisdiction of the French authorities but under that of Serbia. They had been transferred to France after Serbia's defeat and disastrous retreat across Albania to the sea, but they had remained in Serbia's charge. Beneš's first step, therefore,

was to ask the Serbian Government through its Minister in Paris whether it would allow the Czech National Council to take control of the Czech prisoners. The Serbian Government was sympathetic; so was the French Ministry of War. But the French High Command made difficulties. It took Beneš nearly two months merely to get permission for direct contact between the National Council and the prisoners. It was more than a year before he was able to overcome what he calls in his *War Memoirs* all the "prejudices, bureaucratic inaction and pettiness, as well as political ignorance and failure to understand the point at issue".

Patience, however, won its reward in the end—patience and the driving power of Clemenceau, the Tiger, who became Premier of France on November 16, 1917. Thirty days later, on December 16, 1917, the Tiger signed a decree approving the formation of the Czech National Army. Of the 4,000 prisoners brought to France from Serbia almost all were incorporated in the Czech National army during 1918. With the help of a Serbian general with whom Beneš made great friends, all the Czech officers and men who had enlisted in the Serbian army were also transferred to the Czech army in France. These successes served as a precedent for similar moves in Italy where there were some 10,000 Czech prisoners. Thus by 1918, when the volunteers from America, Canada and elsewhere were added in, the Czechs had a well-organized force of some 15,000 to 16,000 men at their disposal in the West, fighting the battle of Czech liberation many miles from their own homeland. They did not get home for some months after

the war ended. The much larger contingent from Russia, which had aroused French hopes fruitlessly at the outset of Beneš's negotiations, was later still. After fighting its way 5,000 miles, not only against the Bolsheviks but against German and Austrian prisoners armed by the Bolsheviks, it captured Vladivostok and was gradually evacuated during the whole of 1920 in ships lent by the Allies. It might have been there still, but for the perseverance and persuasiveness of Beneš in arguing the case for the provision of the requisite transport facilities.

One more word may fittingly be said here about the Siberian anabasis because it shows how greatly the existence of the Czech Siberian Army struck the popular imagination and contributed to the success of the negotiations Beneš was conducting with the Allied Governments. On September 11, 1918, Mr. Lloyd George wrote to the President of the Czechoslovak National Council¹ as follows:

On behalf of the British War Cabinet, I send you our heartiest congratulations on the striking successes won by the Czechoslovak forces against armies of German and Austrian troops in Siberia. The story of the adventures and triumphs of this small army is, indeed, one of the greatest epics of history. It has filled us all with admiration for the courage, persistence, and self-control of your countrymen and shows what can be done to triumph over time, distance, and lack of material resources by those holding the spirit of freedom in their hearts. Your nation has rendered inestimable service to Russia and to the Allies in their struggle to free the world from despotism; *we shall never forget it.*

¹ Masaryk was then in America, on his way home from Siberia, and the reply was therefore sent by Beneš on Masaryk's behalf.

The italics are mine. Almost exactly twenty years after Mr. Lloyd George wrote those stirring words, another British Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, described the Czechs as "people of whom we know nothing". The sequel to the Czechs' "inestimable service" in the "struggle to free the world from despotism" was the ultimatum of Munich, which placed Czechoslovakia at the mercy of a despotism far more ruthless than that of the Kaiser, without giving her an opportunity to say a single word in her own defence. Less than six months after Munich, Czechoslovakia had disappeared from the map of Europe.

Beneš was not quite accurate in ascribing France's opposition to his plan for a Czech National Army solely to prejudice, inaction, stupidity, and ignorance. There was another reason. Shortly after Beneš first mooted the idea, Francis Joseph, the aged Emperor of Austria, died.¹ The accession of his successor, the Emperor Charles, was the signal for what Beneš has called "the Peace Offensive of the Central Powers". When this failed, there was an attempt on the part of France and Great Britain to induce Austria-Hungary to make a separate peace with the Allies. The Habsburg Empire was already approaching exhaustion-point, and but for the fact that the Central Powers were at that time having great military successes, these peace overtures might have been accepted. Rumania, however, was crushed during 1917 within a short while of having entered the war on the side of the Allies; Russia collapsed into revolution, and the Italians suffered overwhelming defeat at

¹ November 21, 1916.

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Caporetto. Austria-Hungary therefore felt encouraged to refuse.

The period of these secret negotiations, which were mostly carried on in Switzerland, was naturally a very critical time for the Czech National Movement. Had the *attempt been successful, the best the Czechs could have hoped for* was some sort of autonomy in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Autonomy might and probably would have satisfied them in the early days of the war. But two and a half years of waiting and scheming had already sharpened their appetite. They now wanted complete independence.

Consequently Beneš had many anxious hours during 1916 and 1917. His propaganda activities, already seemingly endless, had to be redoubled in order to spike the guns of the peace party. What was worse, his efforts to get recognition for the independence movement had to be speeded up regardless of the danger of rebuffs which hitherto Beneš had felt must be avoided at all costs.

Fortunately for him the Central Powers did their best to *help him out of his difficulties*. Feeling that their internal situation was growing more and more precarious in spite of their victories in the field, they decided to revive the ancient kingdom of Poland¹ and to form a Polish national army. Russia, immediately countered with a proclamation of a different independent Poland in constitutional union with Russia emphasizing (which the rival announcement carefully failed to do) that it must consist of all the Polish territories—those under the rule of Germany and Austria as well as those in Russia. This

¹ November 5, 1916.

tactical war of proclamations naturally helped to bring to the front the question of the other subject nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and so the ultimate effect was to give Beneš an opportunity to push the Czechs into greater prominence.

Another mistake of the Central Powers which Beneš was quick to seize upon was the evasive nature of their reply to a request from President Wilson to explain their war aims. The United States was not yet in the war and Wilson, hoping to clear the ground for eventual peace negotiations, sent a Note to the belligerent countries in December 1916 asking for information. The Central Powers countered by suggesting a meeting of representatives of the opposing sides, but at the same time refusing to give any guarantees concerning the nature of the eventual peace terms. Beneš, with unerring accuracy, at once interpreted this attitude as a sign that the Central Powers wanted at all costs to get to the stage of negotiations believing "that there could then be no resumption of warfare".¹ He mobilized all his journalistic friends in support of the standpoint that before talking peace it was essential to know what sort of a peace. He had the satisfaction of seeing that the Allies in their answer to Wilson expressly included the statement that "Peace is not possible until a reparation of all infringed rights and liberties has been secured, together with a recognition of the principle of nationality and the free existence of small States".

This was the first collective declaration of Allied aims in which a reference to the rights of the smaller

¹ *War Memoirs.*

nationalities appeared. Although it was primarily concerned with Belgium and Serbia, both of which were mentioned by name in the reply, it nevertheless affected by implication all the lesser nationalities of the Habsburg Empire.

Beneš hastened to consolidate his advantage. Finding that the Allies were contemplating a second answer to Wilson, he went round to the French Foreign Office to try to get a direct mention of the Czechs and Slovaks included in it. At first all he got was a very cold douche. The military situation, he was told, was deteriorating, and now made any idea of a fresh Allied threat to fight on until the oppressed nationalities had been liberated quite out of the question. Moreover, there was a possibility, admittedly not a very big one, but a possibility nevertheless, that Austria-Hungary might be induced to make a separate peace, in which case it would be most unwise to antagonize her by burning all boats on the nationality issue.

Beneš pointed out that France in Briand's interview with Masaryk had already committed herself fairly comprehensively to the Czechoslovak cause. But apart from this, he went on, there was definite evidence that Austria-Hungary was torn by internal dissensions and that a categorical commitment by the Allies on the subject of the oppressed nations was calculated not to lengthen the war but to shorten it. The French officials were impressed but not convinced. They suggested that Beneš should put his thesis in writing. Two days later he handed in a special memorandum in which he quoted not only the secret reports which had reached him from the Maffia, but facts

taken from Austrian and Hungarian newspapers. He concluded as follows:¹ "The Czechs form an element which, under present conditions, causes Austria-Hungary the greatest internal difficulties. If, in replying to Wilson, you recognize our political aims and plans, you will strengthen their opposition to Austria, which will thus be completely disorganized."

Meanwhile Beneš again got busy with his journalist and professorial friends. Through them he made contact with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Parliament, and with André Tardieu, then leader-writer on *Le Temps*. The upshot was that next time he went round to the Quai d'Orsay he found things looking much brighter. If it were not found possible to include a specific declaration about the Czechs in the Note to Wilson, he was told, Briand would make an official statement about them either before the French Chamber or in a public audience granted to Beneš as Secretary-General of the National Council.

It sounded pretty good to Beneš but not quite good enough. The French were contemplating using the word Czech alone or alternatively Bohemia. Beneš wanted a mention of the Slovaks, too. It was true that the official title of his organization was National Council of the Czech Lands. But the title had been chosen merely for other people's convenience. There were many Slovaks in the movement as well as Czechs, and the two races were working for a common end and towards a common future. So Beneš strongly urged the Quai d'Orsay to include the word Slovak as well as the word Czech.

¹ *War Memoirs*.

"I suggested", he says,¹ "the formula to the effect that one of the Allied war aims was 'the liberation of the Czechs united with Slovakia' or else 'the liberation of the Czechoslovaks', leaving the Allies, of course, free to word it in accordance with the context."

Beneš's insistence raised another difficulty. If the Slovaks were mentioned by name why not the Slovenes, and if the Slovenes why not the Croats? Serbia, busy along cognate lines with plans for Yugoslav unity, would be justifiably annoyed if Beneš got his way. On the other hand, Italy might be intensely angry if the word "Yugoslav" were added too to placate the Serbs. Italy still had an acquisitive eye fixed on Dalmatia, and was not in the least disposed in those days to accept the self-determination thesis which Signor Mussolini lauded to the skies when twenty-odd years later Czechoslovakia lost her minorities, and even when, six months after that, the Czechs were made second-class German citizens against their will.

However, Beneš stuck to his guns, and, if not to *his* surprise at any rate to Masaryk's, he won his point. On January 7, 1917, the Quai d'Orsay told him that the Allies had decided to inform Wilson expressly that the liberation of the Czechoslovaks was one of their war aims. The previous formula had spoken of an independent Poland with access to the sea and had lumped the Czechs and Slovaks with the Croats, Slovenes, and Serbs, under the omnibus title of Slav. In its final form the Note spoke of "the liberation of Italians, Slavs, Roumanes, and

¹ *War Memoirs*.

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Czechoslovaks from foreign rule". It carefully avoided mention of the Yugoslavs.

Masaryk calls this Allied Note of January 12, 1917, "a brilliant success for our cause". He himself had no hand in it and the whole credit must go to Beneš. "I could see at once from the text of the Allied reply", Masaryk wrote,¹ "that the word 'Czechoslovaks' had been inserted into a completed draft which had demanded only the liberation of the 'Slavs' in general; and this turned out to have been the case." He immediately telegraphed to Beneš: "This success is unexpectedly great. Inform me whether we owe it to Briand. It will now be possible to state the fact in the papers. Your share in the success will also be appreciated." Other telegrams and letters of congratulation showered in on the Secretary-General from all parts of the world: from the Russian and American colonies, from Czech soldiers, from individuals in Italy, Switzerland, England, and many other countries. "It acted upon me", writes Beneš,² "as a stimulus and encouragement to continue our military movement." It also served to hamstring, but not silence, the personal criticisms to which he was subjected. From now on his position as the leading Czechoslovak diplomat and negotiator, after Masaryk, was unassailable, though it continued to be assailed time and time again.

The negotiations which led up to this success convinced Beneš he had got to do something about Italy. As soon as he knew he had won his fight for the inclusion of the Czechoslovaks in the Allied Note he hurried off to Rome, arriving there on the very day the Note was

¹ *The Making of a State.*

² *War Memoirs.*

published. He found, not unnaturally, that the sensation caused by the Note had served to intensify Italian suspicions of the Yugoslavs. Whenever he tried to advocate the Czechoslovak cause he was met with volleys of criticism of the Yugoslavs, particularly the Croats. He heard constantly reiterated assertions that Dalmatia was Italian, and he found almost universal suspicion of the Czechs and Slovaks because of their friendship for the Yugoslavs. Italy, in short, was not only still hankering after Dalmatia, but was not really prepared to accept the break-up of Austria-Hungary as one of the Allied war aims in spite of the Note to Wilson. The Vatican was also strongly opposed to the destruction of Imperial Austria, and its attitude to the Czechoslovaks was therefore one which Beneš himself has described, with marked lack of exaggeration, as "reserved".

Beneš went about his business in Italy with his usual systematic caution. He did not attempt to storm either the Vatican or the Palazzo Chigi until he had fully reconnoitred the ground. First he went to the Russian Embassy; then to the French. With the help of the latter he drafted a statement of the Czechoslovak case to lay before the Vatican. In it he drew attention to the way in which the Austro-Hungarian authorities made use of the Roman Catholic Church to the detriment of the Czechoslovak national cause. He gave chapter and verse to prove that "the Catholic Church there had been the instrument used by those in authority against the oppressed",¹ adding: "I indicated that we should be quite satisfied if the Vatican merely refrained from acting

¹ *War Memoirs.*

against our interests. If it were to oppose us in an active manner and we were then to emerge victorious, this would prove detrimental to Catholicism among our people, all the more so since it was our intention to grant full liberty and rights to all religions and churches in our State and accordingly also to Catholicism, which had a strong position among us."

Certain individual Catholics, among them Cardinal Bourne, appear to have been sympathetic and to have helped Beneš lay the Czech case before the Vatican authorities. But it was soon apparent that the latter did not find the arguments very convincing. The Vatican has a long memory and Beneš thinks one of the reasons the Holy See consistently supported Austria during the World War may have been that it had not forgotten John Hus in the fifteenth century and the Thirty Years War in the seventeenth. Another more contemporary objection was that the Czech prisoners-of-war in Russia had announced their adhesion *en masse* to the Russian Orthodox Church. Beneš sent on this item of the Vatican's count against the Czechs to his friends in Russia "for information", but they were unable to do anything in the matter.

The event fully justified Beneš's warning that the Vatican's opposition "would prove detrimental to Catholicism". Shortly after the war, a formidable movement away from Rome began in Czechoslovakia, and before long secessionists of the Czech National Church had a Church roll of nearly one million.

After Beneš had been in Rome for about a fortnight he decided to approach the Italian Government—again

through the French Embassy. He considered himself at that time a novice in diplomatic matters and has confessed to considerable trepidation when he paid his first official call at the Italian Foreign Office. Moreover, for once he was going to ask a favour instead of offering services. He found his trepidation entirely justified. The General Secretary of the Consulta¹ received him with "bureaucratic reserve", expatiated on the Italian claims to Dalmatia and on the iniquities of the Yugoslavs. However, he ended by showing considerable understanding of and sympathy for the Czechs and appeared ready to help them provided they did not support the Yugoslavs. Seeing that the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav causes were inextricably bound up together this was asking the impossible. The two men therefore parted with polite expressions of good will but with the certainty, at any rate on Beneš's part, that very little was to be hoped from Italy at the moment. Before he was able to do any more spadework, an urgent telegram from Masaryk called him to London to discuss the general situation which had arisen from the second Allied Note to Wilson. It was seven months before he could get back to Rome again.

The Tiber had quite different waters in it in August 1917, when Beneš paid his second visit. By this time his long efforts to bring the Czech National Army into being in France were nearing fruition, and the leaven of the Allied Note to Wilson had begun to work. He was at once accorded an interview with Baron Sonnino, the Italian Foreign Minister. The two men got on unexpectedly well together and their discussions are worth

¹ Signor Demartino.

recording at some length because they provide a typical example of Beneš's methods as a diplomat.

Beneš started off by putting forward three demands: that Italy should officially recognize the National Council in Paris and deal only with this body when discussing all Czechoslovak questions; that the Czechs and Slovaks should be officially accepted as a friendly nation, and that all Czechoslovak civilians interned in Italy should consequently be released; that Czech and Slovak soldiers, including the prisoners-of-war in Italy,¹ should be allowed to join the Czech Army which was being organized in France.

Baron Sonnino made no difficulties about the first two demands but demurred strongly at the third. He said that if he sanctioned the use of Czech prisoners, who were after all Austrian citizens, the Austro-Hungarian Government would retaliate by sending their Italian prisoners to the Balkans, Asia Minor, and Syria, where they would die in thousands. Beneš, listening so to speak between the lines, decided that there was more than met the ear. He soon discovered that Sonnino was by no means certain that the Allies were going to win a decisive victory and was therefore anxious firstly not to antagonize Vienna and secondly to hang on to all the Austro-Hungarian prisoners-of-war as a bargaining counter when the peace negotiations began. Beneš also sensed that the Italian Government was afraid of letting France get too big an influence in Czechoslovak affairs. One of Italy's war aims was to acquire a predominant position in the Danubian basin and the Balkans. Sonnino therefore had not the

¹ See page 92.

slightest intention of playing the French game by helping to build up a formidable Czech army in France under the auspices of the French General Staff.

Beneš therefore immediately changed his tactics without waiting for or even asking the consent of his superiors on the National Council. He proposed that the prisoners in Italy should be formed into a National Army on Italian soil under the auspices of the Italian General Staff. He pointed out further that in France, Russia, and the United States no questions had been raised about the advisability or the legality under international law of employing Czech prisoners-of-war and volunteers against the State of which they were citizens, and he invited Sonnino to reconsider his position in the light of these facts.

It took about a month of patient sapping at Sonnino's defences before Beneš made any more progress. At last, early in October 1917, the Italian Government offered, in addition to official recognition of the National Council, to liberate the prisoners, allow them to take an oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak nation, and give them special badges to denote their status. But the Italian Government still refused to allow the prisoners to be organized into fighting units. They would only let them form a kind of labour corps for service behind the lines. And these units were to remain subject to prisoner discipline, not to army discipline.

An impatient man might have shown disappointment and an over-eager man might have jumped at the Italian proposal as a great advance on any previous offer. Beneš did neither. On the ground that the National Council

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was, *de facto*, if not one of the Allied at any rate one of the Associated Powers at war with the Central States, he consulted the official French, Russian, British, and Serbian representatives in Rome before replying. All of them were in favour of accepting. The National Council in Paris, on the other hand, was extremely disappointed and wanted Beneš to ask for more. Paris was afraid this semi-rebuff from Italy would affect the prestige of the National Council and hinder the formation of the French and Russian contingent of the National Army.

Beneš thereupon told Paris that the Italians "would be obliged to concede to-morrow what they did not concede to-day", and that the National Council should use what had been gained in Italy as a stepping-stone to fresh forward moves in France, after which it could return to the charge in Italy on the basis of the National Movement's new situation in France. He also pointed out that the Italian negotiations were giving them a considerably improved status among the Allies, whose Governments were constantly hearing about the Czechs in reports from their representatives in Rome.

Beneš had his way. He accepted everything he could. He made emphatic reservations about the formation of mere labour corps and the retention of prisoner discipline, thus showing that he intended to raise these questions again in due course.

In the end, however, it was not Beneš who persuaded the Italian Government to sanction the formation of a Czechoslovak National Army but Štefánik, efficiently helped by Italy's crushing defeat at Caporetto in October 1917. The statutes establishing this body as an inde-

pendent unit were, however, drafted on essentially similar lines to those which Beneš was instrumental in securing for the Czech National Army in France, so that he certainly deserves to share the credit with Štefánik.

The negotiations in Paris were not much easier than those in Rome. It is true that there was already a precedent—formation of a Polish National Army in France had been approved in May 1917—but on Štefánik's advice Beneš stood out—albeit somewhat unwillingly—for a different wording from that obtained by the Poles. The Polish decree declared that it was the French Government which was forming the Polish National Army. Beneš asked the French to state specifically that the Czech National Council was forming the Czech force. In the end they compromised and the decree began: "The Czechoslovaks, organized in an independent army, and acknowledging the authority of the supreme French Command in military affairs, will fight under their own flag against the Central Powers." This decree was signed to Beneš's great delight by both Poincaré as President and Clemenceau as Prime Minister on December 16, 1917. But it was not published until February 7, 1918.

At one time it seemed possible that the decree would never be published and that all Beneš's careful building would be for nothing. What Beneš has called "the first ingredient" of the Czech Army in France consisted of some prisoners-of-war who had been brought from Russia via Rumania in June 1917. The French military authorities made the mistake of sending them to a camp in a desolate region in which were also stationed some black

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troops and some "bolshevized" Russians. The Czechs did not like either of their stable-mates. What was equally bad, the presence of the Russians gave the French authorities the idea that the Czechs were Bolsheviks, too. This impression was increased when a further detachment of Czech prisoners from Russia arrived from Archangel on November 12th—within a few days of the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution. The French immediately gave the Czechs the proverbial bad name, and the recipients were very nearly successful in hanging themselves with it. They grew mutinous and not without considerable justification. They were neither prisoners-of-war nor free soldiers. They had no legal status, their rations were bad, their quarters uncomfortable, and they had nothing to do except grouse. Added to which there was far too high a proportion of officers, who if possible resented their anomalous position more even than the men.

The unfortunate Beneš, who was engaged in delicate and important negotiations in Paris, suddenly discovered that if he did not go down personally to pacify the malcontents the whole plan for constituting a National Army under its own commander-in-chief, and its own general staff, would be blown sky-high. With it would go all hope of using this army to secure the national frontiers of Czechoslovakia when the war was over. So Beneš had to leave his negotiations—Masaryk was in Russia by this time and Štefánik in America—and spend three precious days stifling an incipient mutiny with nothing more substantial than arguments and promises that all would be all right in a very problematical future. The men had been

six weeks in a state of uncertainty, boredom, and discomfort, and it was not surprising that the waiting, as Beneš says in his *War Memoirs*, "filled many with indignation and demoralized others. Not having been fully acquainted with the status of our soldiers in France, they had come there full of enthusiasm, expecting to join an independent army completely established. It was natural that they soon began to lay the blame on the National Council and upon myself in particular. I at once realized this, and attempted to pacify them as far as I could, holding out hope to them that the army decree would soon be issued, that the conditions would be changed before long, that we had already achieved successes, and so on."

"But", he adds, obviously with a mental sigh, "it took a long time before I could allay the agitation."

Allay it, however, he did, and so was able to add a postscript saying that "the day upon which the decree (establishing the National Army) was signed was a red-letter day both in Paris and Cognac. The soldiers became soldiers both legally and officially; they became Czechoslovak soldiers, and with enthusiasm they read the decree and the newspaper articles on the new army which had arrived to help France and the Allies."

But dissatisfaction soon broke out again, and the soldiers began to accuse Beneš of being a catspaw of the French Government. In a sense they were right. But he was being it deliberately. The war was reaching its decisive phase and the destiny of the embryo Czechoslovak State was trembling in the balance of great events. The great German drive against the Western front which swept away our own British Fifth Army and brought

from the taciturn Haig his famous order about "Backs to the wall" had just begun. A wrong step at such a moment might have killed the baby State before it was born. To save it Beneš had to be pitiless with the young Czechoslovak army because the soldiers were the only instrument left in his bag which could bring the new State into being. He was therefore determined to use the army to the most patriotic advantage regardless of what the army itself in its ignorance of the critical state of affairs might think. He had "witnessed at close quarters", he says, "how the French military circles had ruthlessly disparaged the Polish army on account of various disorders and disputes whilst in the course of formation, and I therefore determined at all costs to prevent similar disturbances amongst us, and to show that we were more disciplined, better prepared, and more advanced generally. Realizing thus how fateful the consequences would be to us if at this early stage we were to make the slightest blunder, I was uncompromising towards the troops. I insisted that they should unconditionally submit to all instructions from Paris and in particular I prohibited them from engaging in politics. . . ."

Thus was established, and by Beneš, who was not a soldier, the tradition of military discipline and efficiency which gave the Czechs their unique position in international affairs, not only during the peace negotiations, but during the twenty years which followed. How splendid that tradition was, and how firmly rooted, was proved by the Czechoslovak army's behaviour during the dark days of the German occupation of the Sudetenlands in the autumn of 1938. The way in which, though un-

beaten in the field, it obeyed the order to evacuate an almost impregnable defence system evoked admiration even from its opponents. An army which can maintain its cohesion and discipline in the bitterness of a great national disaster is one of which any country can be very proud.

Beneš's unpopularity was immense during those early months of 1918. The colonists in Paris had split into factions—thanks in part to the activities of Austrian secret service agents—and were united only in their disapproval of Beneš. Malcontents stirred up the soldiers, and the soldiers redoubled their complaints to, as well as about, Beneš. There was one occasion, for instance, when a group of eight Czech volunteers who had served four years in the French Foreign Legion came and asked him to get them excused from a tour of duty in the death-trap of Verdun. They were all convinced they would be killed, and one of them had brought a bomb to hurl at Beneš if he did not promise to get them transferred to a quieter sector. Another roundly accused him of being a traitor. They stayed three hours, threatening, entreating, arguing. In the end Beneš convinced them that their duty lay in obeying orders and that by so doing they would be promoting the cause of Czechoslovak independence. Within three days they were all eight in the trenches. Only one of them ever returned. He came to the National Council's headquarters in the Rue Bonaparte with a revolver and bayonet intending to kill Beneš and had to be taken away to a mental hospital.

Of course Beneš had to do what he did, but it was a responsibility which must have weighed more heavily on

him than on almost anybody else in the movement. Štefánik was a soldier, and was taking at least as many risks as the rank and file. Masaryk was an old man long past military age who, even so, endured his baptism of fire during the Bolshevik Revolution, and came through the ordeal with the most resplendent credit. Beneš was a young man, healthy and athletic. Yet he could not go and fight although he had to make others do so. Only a really brave man could have filled such a rôle without his nerve failing him.

But the day was coming when Beneš's ruthless treatment of the Czechoslovak army was to bear fruit in a resounding political success. In June 1918, four months after the army decree was published, the French President agreed to present colours to the 21st Regiment. Beneš had long and earnest talks with the Quai d'Orsay on the subject of the speech the President was to make on this occasion. In the end the results even surpassed Beneš's most optimistic hopes. Let him tell the story in his own words: "The presentation of the colours", he writes,¹ "had been arranged to take place on June 30th, at Darney in Alsace, and on the day before leaving to take part in the ceremony, Pichon (the Foreign Minister), in accordance with the agreement between us, sent me a declaration which manifested so generous an attitude towards our cause that it had an overwhelming effect on us in the Rue Bonaparte when we received it on June 29th at about one o'clock in the afternoon. Again and again in my excitement I read the words: 'The Government of the Republic will make its utmost efforts in order, at a given

¹ *War Memoirs.*

moment, to fulfil your aspirations for independence within the historical frontiers of your territories.' Again and again I read the words acknowledging our rights, expressing the desires and obligations of the French Government, acknowledging our activities, efforts, and struggles. I felt that now we had reached an important stage in the struggle, in the victorious struggle."

Less than six weeks later, Great Britain followed France's example. "Since the beginning of the war", wrote Mr. Balfour on August 9, 1918, in an official declaration to the National Council, "the Czechoslovak nation has resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czechoslovaks have constituted a considerable army, fighting on three different battlefields and attempting in Russia and Siberia to arrest the Germanic invasion.

"In consideration of its efforts to achieve independence", the British declaration goes on, with grammar that is slightly dubious, but with an intention that is unmistakable, "Great Britain regards the Czechoslovaks as an Allied nation, and recognizes the unity of the three Czechoslovak armies as an Allied and belligerent army waging regular warfare against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

"Great Britain also recognizes the right of the Czechoslovak National Council, as the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak national interests and as the present trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government, to exercise supreme authority over this Allied and belligerent army."

There is an illuminating passage in Mr. Wickham

Steed's book *Through Thirty Years* about that word "trustee", which shows that Beneš was not quite so much at ease when dealing with British diplomats as with French and Italian. "On the evening of his arrival", says Mr. Wickham Steed, "Beneš brought to me, at *The Times* office, the French formula of recognition, and asked whether I thought Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil would make any difficulty about granting British recognition forthwith. I advised him to try, and promised him all the help I could give. Next evening he returned, looking very disconsolate. He had discussed the question at great length with Lord Robert Cecil and Mr. Balfour, who had declined to accept the French formula or to promise immediate recognition. They had argued that for Great Britain to recognize the Czechoslovak National Council 'as the first basis' of the future Government of an independent Czechoslovak State would be to curtail the freedom of the Czechoslovak people to choose another Government should they wish to do so; and that it was indispensable that the subject Habsburg races should be left quite free to determine their own form of government.

"Beneš could not understand this reasoning. He knew that Masaryk, Štefánik, and he possessed the full confidence of the Czechoslovak people and of the Czechoslovak Legion that was then fighting its way through Siberia towards Vladivostok; and he feared that some unconfessed object might lie behind British official reluctance.

" 'Is that the only objection that Balfour and Robert Cecil raised?' I asked.

" 'That is the only one they mentioned', answered Beneš.

" 'Then you will get your recognition to-morrow', I replied.

"Beneš jumped for joy.

" 'Have they told you that?' he asked eagerly.

" 'No', I said, 'they have told me nothing; but, if that is the only objection, we can remove it with one word. Give me your formula.'

"Beneš handed me the document he had discussed with Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil. I put my pen through the words 'as the first basis of' and wrote above, 'as trustee for' the future Czechoslovak Government.

" 'Take that to the Foreign Office to-morrow,' I said, 'and you will get your recognition.'

" 'What does it mean?' asked Beneš, whose knowledge of French and German was superior to his knowledge of English.

" 'Don't ask, my dear fellow', I answered. 'You will never understand. "Trustee" is a mystical word. It is legal, moral, metaphysical, anything you like, but it will do your business for you.'

" 'What is the French for it?' inquired Beneš incredulously.

" 'There is no French for it', I answered. 'The dictionary may say that the French for "trustee" is *fonde de pouvoirs, délégué*, or *homme de confiance*. But "trustee" means much more than that. It means that you will be recognized as responsible for the faithful expression of the wishes of the Czechoslovak people, if and when they wish to form an independent State and Government of

their own, but that they will be entitled to get rid of you if they do not want you.'

"Still puzzled and only half-convinced, Beneš returned next day to the Foreign Office, and came in glad haste to see me again in the afternoon.

" 'They have agreed to recognize us,' he exclaimed. 'They made not the slightest difficulty. They swallowed the word "trustee" like cream, but I still don't know what it means.' "

On September 2nd, President Wilson went even further than Great Britain and France—so much further, in fact, that his Proclamation is also worthy of being *printed in full*.

The Czechoslovak peoples having taken up arms against the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and having placed in the field organized armies which are waging war against those Empires under officers of their own nationality and in accordance with the rules and practices of civilized nations, and Czechoslovakia having in the prosecution of their independence in the present war confided the supreme political authority to the Czechoslovak National Council, the Government of the United States recognizes that a state of belligerency exists between the Czechoslovaks thus organized and the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

It also recognizes the Czechoslovak National Council as a *de facto* belligerent Government, clothed with proper authority to direct the military and political affairs of the Czechoslovaks.

The Government of the United States further declares that it is prepared to enter formally into relations with the *de facto* Government thus recognized for the purpose of prosecuting the war against the common enemy, the Empires of Germany and Austria-Hungary.

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Masaryk was in America when President Wilson issued this generous recognition. The two ex-professors were old friends and no doubt this helped. But, as in the case of the French and British pronouncements, the first stress was on the Czechoslovak Army, thus showing that Masaryk was right when he said that without soldiers they would "obtain nothing",¹ and fully justifying Beneš in the attitude he had taken toward the would-be mutineers of Cognac.

President Wilson's Proclamation also showed that the years of travail were nearing an end. The Allies were actually in sight of victory, though as yet they had no idea that the Armistice was only two months away. Beneš, however, realized that although he was expecting another year of war, he must press his diplomatic campaign with redoubled energy. It was essential that when fighting ceased, the National Council should have already been recognized completely not only by the United States, but by all the Allied and Associated Powers not merely as a "trustee" and "the basis of" some future Czechoslovak Government, but as itself being that Government. Having made up his mind, Beneš went ahead without consulting even Masaryk. On September 11th, only nine days after Wilson's Proclamation, he sent a message to the Maffia in Prague through the usual underground channels telling them what he proposed to do. The Provisional Government, he told Prague, would consist of a Prime Minister, Masaryk; a Minister of War, Štefánik; and a Minister of Foreign Affairs, himself. Masaryk, of course, was in Washington and Štefánik on

¹ See page 90.

his way to Siberia, so that the arrangement really left the whole executive power in Beneš's hands. He was only thirty-four, but neither his age nor the weight of his responsibilities worried him in the least.

In his letter to the Maffia, Beneš warned against the danger of schisms in the movement. There must not, he said, "be one Government coming into existence here and another Government among you. Whenever a Government is to come into existence in Bohemia, the step must be taken in agreement with us, in unity with us, and in continuity with us. . . ."

He went on to say that there was no longer any danger of the Allies trying to make a separate peace with Austria-Hungary, nor of the Allies not fighting to a finish. It would be suicidal, therefore, for the Maffia to try to make terms with Austria, and he urged them not only to refuse an offer which had been made them to enter the Austrian Parliament, but to break off all relations with Austria-Hungary though without provoking a premature revolt among the German elements. The Allies' main military moves, he concluded, would not be made till the following spring, by which time the Provisional Government would be "adequately organized" and there would be "a definite political and military agreement with the Allies on the subject of the plan for overthrowing Austria-Hungary by an external offensive and an internal revolution".

Having thus primed Prague, Beneš felt that the time had come to let Masaryk into his secret, too. On September 13th he sent him the following cable:¹

¹ *War Memoirs.*

In consequence of negotiations carried out in Paris and London their Governments fully accept principle of complete recognition of our Government. I have made an agreement with Ministry of Foreign Affairs enabling us at once to organize our central administrative body, the Czechoslovak Government, with regular diplomatic service. Seat of Government should be Paris, and we should have same status as Belgian Government with all advantages and entire public recognition internationally.

I submit this matter to you with my personal opinion of these questions. In view of situation here it would be good to set up a ministry under your presidency, with headquarters at Paris. It would be necessary to set up, beside the presidency of the ministerial council, also a Ministry of War and of Foreign Affairs. I do not know your opinion as to distribution of portfolios. I think that it will be essential to set up these three ministries, and as regards the others we should keep to the opinion that they are to be given to political leaders from Bohemia.

We could, in addition, set up State secretariats for finance and the interior.

The minister who might be in Paris in absence of the others could, for the interim, manage the remaining ministries. It would also be necessary to establish legations at Rome, Paris, London, Washington, and Tokio, and also to appoint our representatives to the Serbian Government, with the title of *Chargé d'Affaires*, at least for the time being. . . . In view of situation I am compelled to begin making these new arrangements now. Considering the last declaration and the situation as a whole, I regard it as somewhat dangerous to start without having our juridical status precisely defined, or without immediately transforming the National Council into a regular Government. I see from the Austrian papers that our people at home are reckoning upon this. Kindly let me have a telegraphic reply to all these questions, and inform me of your fundamental views.—BENEŠ.

After cogitating over the matter for nearly a fortnight, Masaryk cabled back his cordial approval.

Beneš's time-table, based as it was on a victorious Allied offensive in the spring of 1919, soon began to go gloriously awry. On the very day that Masaryk sent his reply—September 26th—Bulgaria appealed for a separate armistice. Shortly after, Turkey followed suit. By the end of October, the Austro-Hungarian army, shaken by its defeat on the Piave in September, had mostly gone home. Exactly two months after Beneš had written to the Maffia, the armistice with Germany had come into force and the war, bar the talking at Versailles, was over.

This rapid cascade of major events forced Beneš to go ahead in top gear. On October 14th, he went to the Quai d'Orsay and quietly asked his friend Berthelot¹ what he thought the French Government would do if it were notified officially that a Czechoslovak Government had been set up and Czechoslovak independence proclaimed. Berthelot said: "If the Government is notified of any decision on the part of the National Council it will certainly at once adopt a favourable attitude towards anything of the kind."

Beneš took special note of the words "at once" and went straight back to the Rue Bonaparte where he drafted an official note announcing the establishment of an interim Czechslovak Government. It was in Berthelot's hands at six o'clock the same evening. Copies of the document went to all the Allied representatives in Paris at the same time together with separate communications announcing the names of those whom it was intended to

¹ Political Director of the French Foreign Office.

accredit as official diplomatic representatives respectively in Paris, London, Rome, and Washington—subject to the usual official approval.

France wasted no time. On the very next day Beneš received a letter granting full recognition¹ to both State and Government. On October 18th, President Wilson sent a note to the Swedish Minister in Washington for transmission to Vienna, in which he reiterated the statement in his Note of September 2nd to the effect that the Czech National Council was a "*de facto* belligerent Government". On October 21st, the Italian Ambassador in Paris wrote to Beneš to say that the Italian Government was granting official recognition. On October 23rd, the British Government, characteristically ignoring the question of recognition, tacitly acknowledged the new régime by instructing Lord Derby, the British Ambassador in Paris, to accept the appointment of a Czech Minister at the Court of St. James's. By October 24th, all the principal Allied and Associated States had recognized the new State and had accepted the National Council's nominees as its interim Government.

The Beneš time-table had contemplated among other things a Proclamation of Czechoslovak independence² issued from Paris as a symbolic gesture on November 8, 1918, the anniversary of the Battle of the White Mountain. The Proclamation was issued not in Paris, but in Prague itself, on October 28th, and there was nothing symbolic about it. It recorded a definite fact.

¹ Some authorities (e.g. Prof. Temperley's *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*) regard full recognition as dating from the first Plenary Session of the Peace Conference on January 18, 1919.

² Not to be compared with the Washington Declaration of Independence of October 18, 1918. See page 122.

Beneš himself, of course, was unable to be present to witness this fruition of his labours for the war was still going on. A few days previously, however, the Austrian authorities, realizing that the utmost concession to the subject races was the last forlorn hope that might save the Habsburg Empire, had given permission to the Czech national leaders to leave the country to consult with their co-nationals in exile. They and Beneš met at Geneva on the very day that the Prague National Committee issued its Proclamation of Independence. After putting on record their gratitude for what had been achieved by the Czech representatives abroad, the delegates from Prague deliberated with Beneš to decide what form of government their new State should have. Some wanted a monarchy, preferably under one of the Russian Grand Dukes. But mostly they favoured a republic. Beneš, naturally, agreed with the latter. In this he differed from many of the exiles and colonists, a majority of whom, in Masaryk's opinion, wanted a king. Some of them advocated offering the Crown to Prince Arthur of Connaught, and Beneš at Geneva had to make a categorical denial that the National Council had officially negotiated with Prince Arthur "and other hypothetical aspirants to the Prague throne".

Fortunately he had overwhelming proof of the accuracy of this statement. On October 18th, Masaryk in Washington had issued on his own initiative a Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, based on the United States Declaration of July 4, 1776, in which he had specifically stated that the new State was to be a republic.¹

¹ Masaryk, *The Making of a State*.

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The only possible candidate for the presidency of a republic was, of course, Masaryk. Beneš was therefore instructed to cable to him in Washington asking him to return home as soon as possible. The almost incredible fact has already been recorded in these pages that the offer of the presidency came to Masaryk as a surprise. "When I received the telegram telling me that they had elected me President at home", he told Karel Čapek years afterwards, "well I simply hadn't thought of it till then." He replied accepting, but added calmly that as he was busy with important negotiations on the subject of getting the Czech Army out of Siberia, he could not possibly come until they were concluded. It was already December 7th before he got to Paris, and December 21st before he made his triumphal entry into Prague.

So far as Beneš himself was concerned, the effect of the Geneva Conference, coupled with the Prague Proclamation of Independence, was that he went back to Paris confirmed in the position he had assumed as the accredited Foreign Minister of the new State for which Masaryk, Štefánik, and he had laboured so patiently. The child of their dreams had not only been safely delivered, but even duly recognized by its contemporaries in advance of its actual birth. What this represented in the way of achievement may be gathered from the fact that Czechoslovakia was the only new State to participate in the armistice negotiations. Poland was not recognized *de jure*¹ until February 1919, and Yugoslavia not till the Peace Treaties were signed in the following June. The Allied recognition

¹ *De facto* recognition dates from the first Plenary Session of the Peace Conference.

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of Czechoslovakia does, therefore, reflect special credit on those who obtained it.

The first tangible result of admission to the rank of Statehood was that Czechoslovakia was entitled to be represented at the armistice negotiations. But when Beneš got back to Paris from Geneva on November 1st, he found the Allies had forgotten all about the new member of their confraternity. However, a visit to Berthelot soon put this right and in due course he received an official invitation to join in the proceedings.

Let him tell his own story of his feelings on that occasion.¹

"I must confess that I was highly excited when, on the afternoon of November 4th, I took my seat in a motor-car decorated with our flag and drove through Paris by way of St. Cloud and Sèvres to Versailles. When for the first time I entered the hall at Versailles where all the mighty of this world were assembled—mighty especially at that moment when they were settling the destiny of three Empires in Europe and Asia—and when I took my seat beside Vesnić and Venizelos,² I could scarcely believe in the reality of what was happening. Three years previously I had escaped across the frontiers of Bohemia, crawling through the thickets to avoid being seen by Austrian and Bavarian gendarmes, and staking the whole future on what destiny might bring. Now I was sitting in conference with the representatives of France, Great Britain, United States, Italy, Japan, Serbia, Greece, Belgium, and Portugal to decide with them as to the fate of the Empires of Wilhelm and Karl, and to sign the terms of their capitulation."

¹ *War Memoirs.* ² Respectively Serbian and Greek representatives.

Weaning Time

ALTHOUGH THE INFANT Czechoslovak State officially saw light on October 28, 1918, when its independence was publicly proclaimed in Prague, and although its existence had been recognized by the Allies before it actually came into the world,¹ it was still a State without frontiers and without a Constitution—a State whose writ did not run even within the territories which it claimed to govern.

Beneš had comparatively little to do with the drafting of the Constitution, which was done in Prague under the watchful eye of Masaryk. But he had a very great deal to do with the establishment of the frontiers and played a considerable part in the diplomatic battles which helped to oust several rivals from contested fields to which the new Republic ultimately established its claim. From now on, however, he was not nearly so free an agent as in those tense closing months of the war when he bore the brunt of the battle which brought the Czechoslovak Army and State into being. His associate during the peace negotiations was Dr. Kramář,² the first Czechoslovak

¹ As already stated, some authorities, e.g. Professor Temperley in the *History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, consider that recognition was not complete until the Czech delegates were admitted to the first Plenary Session of the Versailles Conference on January 18, 1919.

² Pronounced Kramarsh, and spelt Kramarsh, too, by some of the authorities quoted in this book.

Prime Minister, who had been one of the delegates at the Geneva Conference which had decreed that Czechoslovakia should be a republic. Dr. Kramář had been cooped up inside Austria-Hungary all through the war and had not been brought into contact with any of the Allied Governments until he came to Paris. His views and Beneš's did not always coincide either on the question of the final objective to be pursued during the peace negotiations or on the best way of reaching that objective. At the same time, he was Beneš's superior and nearly twice Beneš's age. What with Kramář and a whole Cabinet at home in Prague, not to mention an active opposition and a comparatively outspoken Press, Beneš could no longer do exactly as he liked, as he had become used—perhaps too used—to doing.

Another of Beneš's problems was Clemenceau, the Tiger. Clemenceau had very definite ideas about the way affairs should be conducted at a peace conference, particularly on the question of the proper way to treat the lesser fry among the technically equal sovereign States. He ordered them about, forced them to wait his pleasure in corridors and ante-rooms, criticized them audibly to their faces. In short, the lot of Beneš did not become easier although his diplomatic status had risen. On the contrary, his problems became more complicated and more interwoven one with another.

For one thing, now that the major fighting had ceased he had less to offer his associates than when the issue of war still hung in the balance. The big Powers no longer wanted the help of the Czech Army now the enemy had capitulated; they only wanted to get rid of it. In other

words, after the Armistice, Beneš had to learn a new technique of diplomacy—the finesse of the chess-player instead of the trafficking of the bargain-hunter.

Though hostilities had officially ended, the existence of the young Czechoslovak State was still in serious jeopardy. It was menaced by starvation within and invasion without. Famine was stalking through the entire country owing to the utter collapse of the whole economy of the Habsburg Empire; invasion threatened from Hungary, many of whose regiments had gone home *en masse* from the Italian front even before the armistice was signed, pleading that they must protect the ancient Hungarian frontiers. As these frontiers included the whole of Slovakia, which had been an integral part of the Hungarian kingdom for about one thousand years, conflict with the Czechoslovak State was inevitable. In fact, seeing that the Czech Army was still hundreds of miles from home—in France, Italy, and Siberia—it looked very much as if the Hungarians might get away with it and prevent the Czechs and Slovaks from uniting, especially as the big Powers were obviously war-weary and had no stomach for any more fighting.

Beneš, after consultation with Prague, dealt with the first of these two problems by signing an agreement with the American Relief Commission under Mr. (afterwards President) Hoover. Allied Missions were established in Hamburg and Trieste, and through these ports essential foodstuffs were distributed not only in Czechoslovakia but also in Austria. But it was many months before the spectre of starvation began to recede and, until it had been completely banished, the possibility of Czecho-

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slovakia becoming bolshevized could not be ignored. This fact was not without importance for the solution of Beneš's second problem—the wresting of Slovakia from Hungary.

Czechoslovakia in its earlier days had perhaps an inordinately large proportion of Communists among its industrial elements in Bohemia and Moravia. Hence Beneš found that the Allies were very much afraid of a Bolshevik State being established in the very heart of Europe, and he played his pawn accordingly. It was particularly useful during the short-lived Communist régime of Bela Kun in Budapest. An unsuccessful attempt by a Czech Communist to murder Kramář at about this time helped to establish the legend of the Bolshevik propensities of Czechoslovakia in the eyes of the Versailles delegates.

In the long run, however, the Bolshevik pawn metamorphosed into a boomerang, and from a boomerang into one of the nooses which helped to bring about the strangulation agreement of Munich. Many people in Western countries got the idea that all Czechs were Communists. It did not make the slightest difference that the rumour was untrue. It was widely believed, which was all that really mattered.

Various things that happened after the peace negotiations helped to fasten this fallacy round Czechoslovakia's neck. During the war of 1920-21 between Poland and the U.S.S.R., Czech workers showed their sympathy for the Soviets by refusing to handle consignments of munitions urgently needed by the Polish Army. The Poles, like elephants, have long memories and they never forgot. It was one of the reasons why in after years they

could not bring themselves to make friends with Czechoslovakia even though the rebirth of German militarism made such a friendship an imperative necessity for both countries. Poland's attitude of mind was one which the matter-of-fact Beneš could not fully understand, otherwise perhaps he would have taken more pains to dispel Polish apprehensions. Instead, he intensified them by following France's example and signing the Czech-Soviet Pact of 1935. Beneš quite truthfully pointed out that he was personally responsible for the provision in this Treaty which says that the Russian guarantee would not be operative unless and until France had first fulfilled her obligations to come to Czechoslovakia's help under the Franco-Czech treaty of alliance. He explained that he had done this designedly in order to show the world that his country leaned towards Western Democracy, not towards Eastern Communism. But the Poles never believed him. Nor did thousands of good Tory democrats in England. That is the principal reason why the German propaganda machine was so effective in its efforts to work upon England's fear of Bolshevism during the Sudeten crisis of 1938. There can be no doubt that an entirely erroneous belief that Czechoslovakia was already semi-bolshevized played a prominent part in alienating the sympathies of a considerable and influential section of the British public from Czechoslovakia. That and a most successful, subtle, and inaccurate resuscitation of the Wilsonian gospel of self-determination.

In November, 1918, however, the possibility of Czechoslovakia going Bolshevik was one which definitely could not be ignored—which meant equally that the

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claims of the non-Bolsheviks who were in power in Prague could not safely be ignored by the Big Four who were running the Peace Conference. This was all the more important because while Beneš was busy in Paris with plenipotentiaries of the Great Powers drafting the armistice terms, General Franchet d'Esperey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Eastern Army, had agreed armistice conditions of his own with a Hungarian delegation at Belgrade. The Paris terms signed on November 4th had been drafted almost exclusively with an eye on Italy and Italy's frontier with Austria. They contained no mention of provisional boundaries for Hungary. Meanwhile Hungary staged a revolution in the early days of November and broke away from the Austro-Hungarian Government in Vienna which had been responsible for the Paris terms. It was with this new revolutionary Hungarian Government headed by the Liberal statesman, Count Karolyi, that the Belgrade armistice was signed.

The Belgrade provisional frontier gave to the Hungarians a considerable part of Slovakia and was regarded with the utmost displeasure and concern in Prague. Beneš therefore was ordered to make immediate representations in Paris with a view to having them altered.

Beneš based his claim on the fact that the Karolyi Government was not recognized under international law and therefore that the Belgrade terms had no juridical value. Actually, of course, what really mattered was not the juridical aspect of his case, but the military situation. This was clearly demonstrated a couple of years later by

Turkey, when her rulers repudiated the duly-negotiated Treaty of Sèvres and secured the much more favourable Treaty of Lausanne in its place.

Immediately after the Armistice, nobody wanted fresh large-scale hostilities over the non-existent frontiers of an as yet unorganized State like Czechoslovakia, and it was therefore likely that Slovakia would provide yet another instance of possession being regarded as nine points of the law.

Beneš, in short, was in a quandary, for the military situation from the Czech point of view was distinctly bad. The Czechoslovak Army was still abroad; the Hungarian Government still had considerable forces at its disposal. When the Czechs began to occupy the ex-Hungarian province of Slovakia with a force of about eleven hundred local levies plus gendarmes, the Hungarians immediately countered by mobilizing several divisions with which they drove the Czechs back not only to the Belgrade line but beyond it. Indeed, on November 17th Karolyi sent a Note to Prague in which he claimed the whole of Slovakia as Hungarian territory. What was almost worse, the Allied Military Mission in Budapest stood out strongly for the Belgrade provisional frontier.

In the end, however, but only after many hours of arduous argument and discussion, Beneš induced the Allies to repudiate the Belgrade frontier and give the Czechs the provisional line they wanted. Fortunately for Prague, the Hungarians, unlike the Turks, did not call Paris's bluff. Instead, they accepted the new provisional line under protest. It was a notable diplomatic triumph for Beneš, who thus put his country in a very strong

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position for the coming peace negotiations at which the frontiers of the new Europe were to be finally fixed.

The line Beneš thus secured as the provisional Czechoslovak frontier with Hungary was announced in Paris at the end of a somewhat less menacing battle of wits with Austria and Germany in which Beneš won all along the line. At the end of October 1918 the German-speaking sections of Bohemia formed themselves into two new provinces, known respectively as Deutschböhmen and Sudetenland, which then voted themselves to be an integral part of the new State of Austria on the basis of the self-determination clause of President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points. The Allies took no notice of this action and implicitly assigned to Czechoslovakia the whole of the historic frontiers of Bohemia which had been Masaryk's and Beneš's original objective. Early in December, however, the Austrian Government sent a formal protest to the Allies against the incorporation of the German-speaking districts in Czechoslovakia, and demanded that they should be granted a plebiscite. This request was followed three days later by a proposal that the Austro-Czech and Austro-Yugoslav frontier should be settled by arbitration.

Beneš immediately went round to all the chief Allied delegations in Paris and submitted a reasoned memorandum setting forth the Czech claim to the historic frontiers with his usual wealth of detail, and explaining that if peace was to be established quickly in Central Europe it was essential to fix the provisional frontier at once. By Christmas time he had won his point. At his request the Quai d'Orsay sent to the

Austrian Government through the Swiss Legation in Paris a categorical refusal to consider either the claim for a plebiscite or the proposal for arbitration to fix the frontier. "The question of the frontiers here at issue", wrote M. Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, "cannot be settled otherwise than by the Peace Conference, and for this purpose must be investigated by the Allied Governments at a very early date.

"The French Government, however", he went on, "takes the view that the Czechoslovak State, in accordance with the recognition granted to it by the Allied Governments, must have as its frontiers until the decision of the Peace Conference, the existing frontiers of the historical provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia."

M. Pichon then proceeded to delineate for Vienna's benefit the new provisional frontiers of Hungary. Officially speaking, he could not communicate direct with Budapest because the Hungarian Government was still unrecognized by the Allies.

"As regards Slovakia," M. Pichon wrote, "its frontiers must be established thus: The Danube from the present western frontier of Hungary to the River Ipola, thence along the course of the River Ipola to the town of Rimavská Sobota, then in a straight line from west to east as far as the River Už and thence along the course of the River Už to the frontier of Galicia.

"General Franchet d'Esperey", M. Pichon's note concluded, "called upon the Hungarian Government to withdraw its troops beyond these frontiers. This notification has been complied with. These frontiers have thus, in reality, been already respected."

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A few days later, the British followed France's example and accepted Beneš's view, though obviously with no great enthusiasm. The Americans demurred longest on the ground that in the circumstances that existed when the Armistice was signed, to grant Beneš's demand was tantamount to a final settlement because nobody was going to use force to upset a *fait accompli*. Colonel House and his advisers held, moreover, that if they allowed the Czechs to base their claims to territory on historical grounds, they could not logically deny the Poles the same right, and in the American view some of the Polish historical claims ran so counter to the theory of self-determination that they could not possibly be accepted. Ultimately, however, the situation was saved by a definite promise from Beneš that if the provisional frontier were changed by a decision of the Peace Conference, Czechoslovakia would unconditionally accept the Conference's decision as final. Colonel House and his advisers then surrendered at discretion.

Thus it was that on Christmas Eve, 1918, nearly a month before the Peace Conference held its first session, Beneš was able to telegraph to Prague to say that the Allies had approved the immediate occupation of the territories specified in Pichon's Note. Except for two important later additions to the Czech territory—Teschen and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia—and some minor modifications in regard to the Austrian, Hungarian, and German frontiers with Czechoslovakia, the Peace Conference made no changes.

As regards Teschen, Beneš did not get his way nearly so easily in the preliminary negotiations. His countrymen,

relying not only on the historical justice of their cause, but also on the thrice-blessed maxim which underlines the importance of getting one's blow in first, occupied Teschen in January 1919. Their reason for doing so was the fact that deputies had been elected in Teschen to the Polish Diet, and this in the Czech view constituted a breach of an agreement reached in Paris by Beneš and the Polish statesman, Count Zamoiski, during the summer of 1918. This agreement laid down that the Teschen question should be settled by friendly negotiation between the two countries after the war had ended.

Poland, however, was in better odour in Paris than Hungary besides being more powerful, and Beneš had considerable difficulty in putting over his case on this issue. In the end he had to accept a compromise which, while much more satisfactory to the Czechs than to the Poles, was certainly not a complete victory for his diplomacy. This question occupied his attention on and off until the end of July 1920—a whole year and a half—when the two countries agreed on a Solomon's judgment, by which Beneš secured the smaller but more valuable part of the disputed area for his country.

Opinions will differ till the end of time about the hypothetical issue: whether it was wise to put these German, Hungarian, and Polish minorities inside Czechoslovakia instead of letting them join their racial brothers and sisters across the border. But the controversy is really an empty one, because it is quite impossible to know what would have happened if the opposite course had been followed. Suppose, for example, that Germany and Austria had received the Sudetenlands in 1918,

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Would this have put an end for all time to Germany's expansionist and *Drang nach Osten* inclinations? Or would it merely have meant that post-war Germany gained political, economic, and military predominance over Central and Eastern Europe several years earlier than at Munich in September 1938? In any case, it is now only too tragically clear that from the moment the Sudetenlands were given to Germany by the Munich Settlement, the whole of Czechoslovakia lay defenceless at the mercy of the Reich.

When the plea of self-determination was resuscitated during the Sudeten crisis in 1938, German propagandists assured us that the war of 1914-18 (which Germany lost) had been fought for the principle of self-determination, and adjured Great Britain and France not to disgrace themselves by trying to thwart this holy principle in 1938. Germany's sudden championship of this particular right gained a surprising amount of support in England and France seeing that the Germans had (presumably) done their best to prevent the Allies winning the Great War, during which the Germans certainly did not fight on the side of self-determination—they refused to negotiate on the basis of the Fourteen Points when Wilson first propounded them, and they further showed their contempt of the theory on which they based their claim to the Sudetenlands by depriving Russia of large chunks of purely Russian territory in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. And instead of handing back Dobruja to the Bulgarians when they forced Rumania to accept the Treaty of Bucarest, they established a condominium with the Bulgarians, making themselves very perceptibly the

senior partners. Nor, to be accurate, did the Allies fight for this much-misunderstood principle, seeing that the question of self-determination did not arise until the United States entered the war. It was coined, as everybody knows, by President Wilson, who told Congress on February 11, 1918, that "self-determination . . . is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril".

Events, of course, have proved that President Wilson was right. But at least equally right was Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, who discussed the question a number of times with Beneš at Versailles and who wrote during the peace negotiations: "The more I think about the President's declaration as to the right of self-determination the more convinced I am of the danger of putting such ideas into the minds of certain races.

"What effect will it have", Lansing went on, "on the Irish, the Indians, the Egyptians, and the nationalists among the Boers? Will it not breed discontent, disorder, and rebellion? Will not the Mohammedans of Syria and Palestine and possibly of Morocco and Tripoli rely on it? How can it be harmonized with Zionism, to which the President is practically committed?

"The phrase", Mr. Lansing concluded, "is simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end, it is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an idealist who failed to realize the danger until too late to check those who attempt to put the principle in force. What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered! What misery it will cause!"

Wilson, of course, championed the cause of self-determination primarily for the subject races in Austria-Hungary, not for the Germans and Hungarians in that Empire. But when the peace negotiations began, the subject races were not wholly enamoured of the self-determination principle. It was certainly not the chief shaft in Beneš's armoury when he put forward Czechoslovakia's case during the Peace Conference. His claims for frontiers were based on history, geography, economics, and strategy, at least as much as on race. The Big Four quite naturally—and rightly—accepted all five arguments as having validity. Indeed, if they had not done so they would by implication have deprived the British, French, and Italian Empires of any moral or other justification than that of force. If race were the sole criterion for sovereignty, Great Britain would have to surrender, among other places, Gibraltar to the Spaniards, Cyprus to the Greeks, Aden to the Arabs, India to the Indians, and Hong Kong to the Chinese.

During the peace negotiations, therefore, Beneš, acting on instructions from Prague, and, as there is (unpublished) documentary evidence to prove, acting to some extent in a few instances against his own convictions, worked on the theory that a Czechoslovakia from which the Sudetenland had been amputated could neither defend itself nor carry on an independent economic existence. He explained that the frontiers of Bohemia had been unchanged for over a thousand years and that the life of the country necessitated the retention of these frontiers more or less unchanged although the population was not racially homogeneous.

The British History of the Peace Negotiations indicates that Beneš and Kramář completely convinced the Big Four on this point—not that at least three out of the four needed convincing, as we shall see shortly. “On the basis of ‘State Rights’”, it says, “the claim to the ancient frontiers of Bohemia was unanswerable.” And it goes on: “On the other hand, it was argued that the German districts, which lie on the periphery, should also be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination, and to unite either with the rest of German-Austria or with the German Reich. On its theoretical side, such a claim raised the whole question as to what constitutes a unit entitled to self-determination. But the real obstacles to the claim were of a strictly practical nature. German Bohemia could not under any circumstances form a single unit, distinct from the Czech districts; for it falls into four more or less isolated fragments—the north-west or Eger-Karlsbad district, the north-east or Reichenberg-Trautenau district, the Moravian-Silesian group, lying between Olmütz and Troppau, and the strip adjoining Upper Austria, to the South of Budejovice (Budweis). Of these, only the fourth could be united to the Austrian Republic; the other three, if severed from Czechoslovakia, would have to be assigned to Bavaria, Saxony, and Prussia respectively. Even if it were decided to ignore the Czech racial minorities in these frontier districts, it would have been well-nigh impossible to discover a tolerable line of division between Czechs and Germans; for though the centre of the country is overwhelmingly Czech, and the periphery no less overwhelmingly German, there are many intermediate

districts where the two races are inextricably mingled. The abandonment of the historic frontiers—more sharply defined by Nature herself than almost any others in Europe—would have had a treble disadvantage. It would have left Czechoslovakia so entirely defenceless as to be really incapable of independent life; it would have deprived her of a large proportion of those mineral resources upon which Bohemia's prosperity had always rested; and it would have cut off the German districts themselves from their natural market in the agricultural centre of Bohemia, robbed their industries of the Czech workmen on whom they depend, and exposed them to most formidable competition from the great industrial rings of Germany."

It must be admitted, however, that at one time Wilson was not altogether happy about the decision and fought hard against the Eger-Karlsbad sector, where the population is almost entirely German-speaking, being given to Czechoslovakia. Beneš also, in spite of what his detractors have said, was prepared to let certain predominantly German districts be ceded to Germany. It is true that in principle he demanded the greater part of the German districts within the historic frontier of Bohemia and Moravia because he was convinced that they were necessary for the economic welfare and military safety of Czechoslovakia. But he gave his consent in writing to the transference of several areas in northern and western Bohemia to German sovereignty. The proposal put forward by a French expert, General Lerond, which Beneš accepted, would, if it had also been accepted by the Big Four, have changed the old historic frontiers of Bohemia—

Silesia so as to exclude a maximum of some eight hundred thousand of the Germans who ultimately became Czechoslovak citizens. His fellow-delegate, Kramář, the Prime Minister, does not appear to have liked the idea very much, but it nevertheless went to the delegations of the Big Four, presumably with his permission. It is certain that the British and American experts both approved it. On this point there is the remarkable evidence of one of the former, Harold Nicolson, when as a Member of Parliament he recalled the events of Versailles during the debate on November 5, 1938, on the subject of the Munich Conference. "I remember", he said, "... spending hours of my time with my American opposite number trying to work out a scheme, which we did work out—and a very good scheme—under which the Eger and Asch areas were given to Germany. We worked that out and we went to our chiefs who both of them said, 'But you are mad. You were going to give Germany territory for having made war against us. Germany will come out of this war with an acquisition of territory of Bohemia.'

"And, of course", Nicolson added, "it was impossible to get it through."

"Our chiefs" can only mean Wilson and Lloyd George. So far as Wilson is concerned, there is contemporary evidence that he was only won over to the historic frontier settlement after considerable argument. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion therefore that Lloyd George, possibly at the instigation of Clemenceau, was against ceding these districts to Germany, as was also Orlando, the Italian delegate. It is interesting in this connection, therefore, to read what Lloyd George said

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twenty years later in his book, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. Beneš, he says, presented his case (for the historic frontiers) "with great skill and craft. He either ignored or minimized the fact that he was claiming the incorporation in the Czechoslovak Republic of races which on the principle of self-determination, would have elected to join other States. He was full of professions of moderation, modesty, and restraint in the demands he put forward for the new Republic. He larded his speech throughout with phrases that reeked with professions of sympathy for the exalted ideals proclaimed by the Allies and America in their crusade for international right.

"Altogether [in Lloyd George's view], it was a great misfortune that Czechoslovakia was represented at the Peace Conference not by her wise leader, President Masaryk, but by an impulsive, clever, but much less sagacious and more short-sighted politician who did not foresee that the more he grasped, the less he could retain."

It appears incontrovertible on the evidence available that the Big Four "grasped" on Czechoslovakia's behalf a good deal more than did Beneš. Even on Mr. Lloyd George's own showing, therefore, they would be more responsible than Beneš was for Czechoslovakia's inability to retain all that was given her at the Peace Conference. But it is worth pointing out that Mr. Lloyd George's book appeared when the Munich settlement was fresh in everyone's mind. It would be illuminating to know what he would have written six months later when, as a direct consequence of Munich, Hitler established his "protectorate" over Bohemia and Moravia. Would "L. G." then have claimed that but for the sapience of the Big

Four in giving Czechoslovakia more than some of its best statesmen, such as Masaryk and Beneš, thought desirable, Czechoslovakia would have fallen under German domination years earlier than was actually the case? In any event, however, there is not much room for doubt that Hitler's real interest in the Sudetenlands was to give him a jumping-off ground for the creation of a German colonial Empire in Europe on orthodox *Mein Kampf* lines. As proof of this, it is only necessary to point to the diametrically opposite tactics Hitler adopted in regard to the South Tyrol. It would have been no more difficult—if he had really wanted to—to bring back the Sudeten Germans into the Reich than it was to bring back the South Tyroleans. And had he done so he would not have needed to import Italian, Bulgarian, Slovak, and Czech labour to do work which the German population was insufficient to perform.

In any case, Mr. Lloyd George fails to take into account that statesmen when representing their Governments sometimes feel obliged to advocate a course of action with which they are not wholly in sympathy. It is to be hoped that Mr. Lloyd George's own moves to get the ex-Kaiser hanged belong to this category. It must also be pointed out that so far as the Sudetenland was concerned, President Masaryk himself, as we have seen in the earlier pages of this book, stood out more strongly than Beneš for the historic frontiers of Bohemia and Moravia, though there is reason to believe that he approved the Lerond memorandum which would have shortened Czechoslovakia's historic western frontier by a good hundred miles if it had been accepted.

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In two or three places, Versailles modified the old historic Bohemian frontier with Austria in favour of the Czechs—not, be it noted, because it recognized the right of the local population to self-determination (for the local population was mainly German), but in order to give Czechoslovakia control of certain railways on which Beneš and Kramář claimed that industrial Bohemia depended for its very existence. It also accepted the Beneš-Kramář contention that Germany should be called upon to cede a district of Prussian Silesia in order, as the Official History puts it, "to avoid an unnatural and dangerous salient of German territory between Czechoslovakia and Poland". Beneš points out that the population of this region was nearly 90 per cent Czech. Even so, official memoranda which Beneš presented on behalf of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Conference proposed to compensate Germany by handing over certain German districts of Bohemia.

Whereas Beneš based the claim to the Bohemian frontiers mainly on historic rights, the claim he put forward to the Slovak frontiers was (again according to the British Official History of the Peace Negotiations) on the basis of "national self-determination". The phrase, which is not Beneš's own, shows how vague the Peace Conference delegates were about the theory of self-determination, for there were about eight hundred thousand Magyars among the three million inhabitants of Slovakia, and nearly all of them lived alongside their kinsfolk in Hungary proper. In contradistinction to the Official History, Mr. Lloyd George in *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* declares that the Slovak-Hungarian frontier was

"demanded for reasons *geographical . . . and economic . . .* though it 'violates the principle of nationality' ". The discrepancy between these two authoritative accounts of the thesis Beneš propounded conclusively indicates that, as Robert Lansing has stated,¹ nobody, not even President Wilson, had really thought out what the phrase "self-determination" meant. "What unit has he in mind?" wrote Lansing during the negotiations. "Does he mean a race, a territorial area, or a community? Without a definite unit which is practical, application of this principle is dangerous to peace and stability."

Wilson, however, never defined his phrase which in consequence, and naturally, was interpreted in accordance with the time-honoured principle that "circumstances alter cases". Equally naturally, the interpretation so far as the Peace negotiations were concerned was almost invariably the one most favourable to the victors. But in the case of Slovakia, as in the case of the Sudetenlands, it is certain that some people had qualms, Wilson as usual among them.

Beneš himself would have been content with a somewhat smaller Slovakia than ultimately emerged from the Peace Conference. He held on firmly to the island known as the Grosse Schütt along the north bank of the Danube, which is inhabited almost exclusively by Hungarians, because he considered that if this district were in Hungarian hands it would be impossible to defend Slovakia. But if he had been pressed he would have agreed to forgo the Danube frontier further eastward where the strategical situation was less dangerous and the

¹ *The Peace Treaties, A Personal Narrative.*

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proportion of Hungarians is somewhat lower than in the Grosse Schütt. That both regions were in the end allocated to Czechoslovakia is due at least in part to the uncompromising resistance of the Hungarians themselves to making peace on any terms short of the complete restoration of the pre-war Hungarian frontiers. Not only did they stage a Bolshevik revolution, but they twice tried to restore the Habsburg Monarchy, besides waging war against the Slovaks and against the Rumanians as well. It was not until June 4, 1920, they were finally forced to accept the Treaty of Trianon which deprived them of three-fourths of their former territory and two-thirds of their former population.

The two other parts of Czechoslovakia which involved Beneš in controversies that persisted through the following years were Teschen and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.

The Teschen dispute is a long and complicated story which it would be tedious to describe in detail. At the outset Beneš and the Polish Premier, Dmowski, agreed that a plebiscite should decide the ownership of this coveted district with its mines, its metallurgical industry, and its important railway connections. Afterwards, however, during the Spa Conference in July 1920, the plebiscite idea was abandoned and a straightforward division was arranged instead. There is no doubt whatever that though the lion's share of the actual territory went to Poland, the corner allocated to Czechoslovakia contained the plums. There is also very little doubt that if Poland had not at the time been in sore straits owing to the war against the Bolsheviks, the Polish Government would never have accepted such a solution. But neither

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of these facts proves that the settlement was unjust. Professor Temperley, on the contrary, describes it as "an unfortunate necessity" and "probably the most equitable in the circumstances". Certain facts are at any rate unquestionable: the area allotted to Czechoslovakia contained more Czechs and Slovaks than Poles or Germans.

It is also incontrovertible that Czechoslovakia needed the Teschen coal and iron far more than Poland did. Furthermore, the railway that passes through the Teschen district was vital to the east-west communications of the Czechoslovak Republic.

There remains the question of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, that strange, neglected backwater which the Hungarians mismanaged for centuries, and which the Great War left like an unwanted baby on the doorstep of Versailles. Obviously, the negotiators at Versailles were not going to give it to Hungary, and it was difficult to give it to Poland whose eastern and southern frontiers were still undetermined. The choice therefore lay between Czechoslovakia and Rumania. Of these two, Czechoslovakia was obviously to be preferred if only because Masaryk, when he was in America, had received a deputation of emigrant Ukrainians who wanted this tiny fragment of their homeland to form part of Czechoslovakia pending the establishment of an independent Ukraine. Czechoslovakia was at any rate a Slav State whereas Rumania looks back with pride to an allegedly Latin origin.

So the Big Four gave Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia in trust as it were, either for Ukraina or for a de-bolshevized Russia which at that time seemed to them a real possibility.

Economically, Ruthenia was a burden because it was miserably poor and Beneš knew that it would constitute a permanent drain on the resources of Bohemia. But strategically and politically it was an asset because it provided the one territorial link between the three heirs of the Habsburg Empire, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, who ultimately became the Little Entente. Even so, Beneš was not particularly keen about having it.

These facts prove that whoever was "grasping" at Versailles it certainly was not Beneš. Even in the famous demand for a north-south "corridor" to divide Austria from Hungary and link Czechoslovakia directly with Yugoslavia, the blame cannot be laid at Beneš's door, though he actually put the proposal before the Peace Conference. He did so at a time when Czechoslovakia's internal condition left much to be desired, and it was therefore highly important that he should at all costs avoid a break with Kramář and other Czech nationalists. This particular demand was one which caused Nicolson to ejaculate indignantly to Kramář, "*Je vous en prie, n'en parlez pas. C'est une bêtise*". Nicolson was no doubt right, although his rather petulant rebuke, he says, caused Kramář to be "extremely startled and Lady Muriel Paget who is there looks across at me with deep blue eyes of reproach".

It is worth mention at this point that Masaryk has put it on record for all (including Mr. Lloyd George) to read, that he was looking forward to a future which the more materially minded British and French politicians did not see, or if they saw, dismissed—presumably—as impractical idealism. In the Declaration of Independence

which Masaryk drafted in Washington in October 1918 he wrote: "We believe that the free nations of Central Europe and of Eastern Europe can easily be federated, if they think it necessary."

Masaryk certainly believed—and it goes without saying that Beneš believed, too—that with patience and tolerance, particularly tolerance, it would in process of time be possible to link in a loose federal system, first Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, after which the incorporation of Greece and the ex-enemy countries, Hungary and Bulgaria, would follow in due course. This long-term policy was to have been the *Ultima Thule* of the anti-Hungarian Little Entente which Beneš with his usual patient industry laboured to construct, first during the long months of the Peace Conference and afterwards, until his efforts were finally crowned with success in the spring of 1921. But the seeds of Little Entente co-operation were really sown long before the war, in the days when the "oppressed nationalities" helped one another against Austrian and Hungarian "oppressors".

It was, however, this very fact—that Europe had for so long been divided between oppressors and oppressed—which really prevented Masaryk's policy from fructifying. There was not and (sad to say) is not a race in Central Europe big-hearted enough to lay aside its ancient grudges and co-operate freely with all its neighbours. Consequently the idea of a grand Central European Federation—a Mittel Europa without Germany—has never been practical politics. But the Mittel Europa ideal may, and certainly should, be realized some time—with Germany's approval and help if possible, but without

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if the old *Drang nach Osten* imperialism still persists, as unfortunately it persists to-day. Masaryk's policy, of which Beneš was the executor during as well as after its originator's lifetime, was based on the fact that racially Central Europe is more dappled with spots than any Dalmatian dog. Since all the different racial islands cannot by any conceivable form of jugglery be gathered together under their own national Governments, the only alternatives are federalism or chaos. National frontiers must become bridges instead of barricades. This is a consummation Beneš has long devoutly desired and which, in spite of everything, he still believes will ultimately come to pass.

Federation, autonomy, centralization, or decentralization, however, like charity, begin at home. For this reason, both Masaryk and Beneš were confronted with a very difficult problem in respect of their own new Republic. While he was in America during the war, Masaryk and Slovak emigrants in America signed the Pittsburg Agreement promising a kind of very restricted autonomy to the Slovaks, which for obvious reasons he could not at the time get the Slovaks at home to approve. This must be regarded as perhaps partially responsible for the vehemence with which a section of the Slovaks afterwards demanded a very large autonomy, though German propaganda was no doubt the main cause, just as German bayonets were the reason Slovakia ultimately became "independent".

So far as Beneš is concerned, it is on record that at the Peace Conference he indicated in a confidential note that it was intended to give Czechoslovakia a form of free

government, similar to (but not identical with) that of Switzerland. Germans, Magyars, and Ruthenians as well as Czechs and Slovaks, were all to rule themselves and at the same time to co-operate in one central government with its seat at Prague.

But here was another idea that was in advance of the time. It was easy for two Czechs—Beneš and Kramář—to formulate in general terms a system of national policy for the new Republic, and it was quite another thing for their Government at home to implement the promise—even to the Slovaks, many of whom had fought shoulder to shoulder with the Czechs during the war. Maybe if Štefánik had lived the story might have been different. But Štefánik was killed in an aeroplane accident when on his way to stem a Hungarian invasion and at the same time to pay his first visit to Slovakia after the Armistice. Be that as it may, it soon became clear when the Prague Central Government started to build up its administrative organs in Slovakia that there were not enough educated Slovaks to go round. Czech officials were consequently imported and once they were in office it became very difficult to dislodge them. The Pittsburg agreement with the Slovaks of America gradually slipped out of the picture.

It was still more difficult to deal with the Ruthenians—and for the same reason though more so. There were at least some educated Slovaks, but there were no educated Ruthenians, for the good and sufficient reason that the feudal Hungarian régime had allowed the Ruthenians no schools at all. A further point of considerable importance was that Slovakia and Ruthenia,

especially the latter, were too poor to be able to afford autonomy. They needed the financial help of the richer—Czech—section of the Republic, and the keepers of the purse strings, being human, not unnaturally insisted on having a hand in spending their own money.

It should be added that the question of Ruthenian autonomy was dealt with in a separate treaty which was under the control of the Council of the League of Nations. During the twenty post-war years that Ruthenia was part of Czechoslovakia, the Prague Government submitted annual reports to the League and obtained the full sanction of the Council to its policy of the progressive application of local autonomy to Ruthenia. Englishmen who knew the country in pre-war days and visited it on various occasions afterwards have assured me that the progress achieved under Czech guidance was really remarkable.

The Ruthenian Treaty is itself a proof that even the Peace Conference accepted the fact that an advanced system of federalism was impracticable as a system of government for a Czechoslovakia which was still in its infancy. Beneš himself has estimated that from forty to fifty years of political education and preparation was required. Whether this estimate is too large or too small, the chaos which overtook Slovakia even more than Ruthenia after the Czech Republic was broken up proves quite conclusively that even twenty years of good government was not long enough to make these regions ready for real autonomy. Even so, it is only fair to Beneš to mention that some two years before the Munich debacle, he urged the Czechoslovak Government to start making

the necessary arrangements for granting a large measure of local autonomy which would be progressively extended both in Slovakia and Ruthenia. The preliminary steps had actually been in course of preparation for many months before the Sudeten crisis put a stop to all plans for the future decentralization of the Republic.

So far as the German and Hungarian minorities were concerned, the considerations which delayed decentralization for Slovakia and Ruthenia did not apply. The German-speaking minority had the money, the education, and the ability to run its own local affairs; the Hungarians, though poor, at least had plenty of potential local administrators. What neither the German nor the Hungarian minority had got, however, was loyalty to the new régime. Their fissiparous, not to say treasonable, tendencies were in fact so unmistakable that it was quite impossible to carry out any kind of cantonization without running the risk of destroying the young Republic. This should have been even more obvious during the Versailles Conference than it became later on, and on this point there is perhaps room for legitimate criticism of the policy Beneš advocated during the peace negotiations, especially when he wrote his much-quoted memorandum of May 20, 1919, which has been interpreted—though inaccurately—as definitely promising a Swiss cantonal system for Czechoslovakia. It would be wrong, however, to assume that he was guilty of deliberately attempting to deceive. A simpler and more charitable explanation is that his enthusiasm ran faster than his capacity to perform. Ancient antipathies coupled with new vested interests were too much for him.

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So much has been written to his detriment on this subject of his alleged failure to implement promises he is supposed to have made at Versailles that it is only fair to hear him in his own defence before we pass final judgment. When the Sudeten issue became acute, there appeared in Prague a booklet by "An Active and Responsible Czechoslovak Statesman" which certainly represents his views of the Versailles negotiations.

"According to the Reich German propaganda", says this booklet, "it was promised in the Czechoslovak memoranda (of May 1919) that the minority problems in Czechoslovakia would be solved in liberal fashion, that German should be the second language in the country, that Czechoslovakia should be a second Switzerland, that Switzerland should be the 'model' for Czechoslovakia in a settlement of the nationality question. . . . All this it is averred has been left unfulfilled and the model of Switzerland has not been followed. The Germans, it is said, have had to fight for their national existence in Czechoslovakia."

Having thus summarized the indictment as it appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*—an indictment which, by the way, was accepted without question during the Sudeten crisis of 1938 by a considerable number of prominent people and some newspapers in England—the booklet points out that what Beneš actually promised in his "Note" of May 20, 1919, was "a sort of Switzerland, taking of course into consideration the special conditions of Bohemia"—or, as it was expressed in another part of the "Note", "a very liberal régime approaching considerably to the Swiss régime".

The so-called "Note" was in reality nothing more than an unsigned summary of confidential talks Beneš had with various members of the Commission which was drafting a minority treaty—not for Czechoslovakia, but for Poland. This treaty afterwards became the model for the treaties to safeguard minorities in all the new countries. The "Note" consisted of nine short points which in essence constituted Beneš's idea of the goal towards which the Czechoslovak State should work.¹ It was in French, and Beneš's approved translation into English is given below in full, partly because it shows what Beneš stood for and partly to dispel the accusations of breach of faith which were so freely levelled at Beneš during the summer of 1938 when the Sudeten crisis was gathering the momentum that brought about his temporary downfall, and the subjugation of the State he helped to found.

1. The Czechoslovak Government (the "Note" runs) intends to organize its State by taking as the basis of the rights of the nationalities the principles applied in the constitution of the Swiss Republic, that is to say, the Government designs to make of the Czechoslovak Republic a sort of Switzerland, while paying regard of course to the special conditions of Bohemia.

2. Universal franchise coupled with the system of proportional representation will be introduced—which will ensure to the various nationalities in the Republic a proportional representation in all elected organs (institutions).

3. The schools throughout the whole territory of the State will in general be maintained out of public funds, and they will

¹ There is also a series of Memoranda on the same subject, the contents of which are on precisely the same lines as the "Note".

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be established for the individual nationalities in the parishes as soon as the necessity arises, on the basis of the number of children in the parish as fixed by law, to inaugurate a school.

4. All public professions (functions) will be accessible to the individual nationalities living in the Republic.

5. The courts of justice will be mixed courts in respect of the language employed, and the Germans will be able to bring their causes before the highest courts in their own language.

6. The local administration (local affairs of the parishes and districts) will be carried on in the language of the majority of the population.

7. The question of a person's religion will not be posed in the Czechoslovak Republic—there will be no difficulties in this connection.

8. The official language will be the Czech language, and the State for external purposes will be a Czechoslovak State. In practice, however, the German language will be the second language of the country, and will be employed on a basis of equality in the current administration, before the courts, and in the central Parliament. It is the intention of the Czechoslovak Government in practice and daily usage to satisfy the population in this connection, but at the same time, of course, a special position will be reserved for the Czechoslovak language and the Czechoslovak element.

9. Expressed in another way we can say that the present position (the Germans had a huge preponderance) in its broad outline will remain unchanged; only the privileges which the Germans had previously enjoyed will be reduced to their due proportions (for example, the number of German schools will be reduced where these schools shall be found superfluous).

In general it will be a very liberal régime approaching considerably the Swiss régime.

If there is any truth in Masaryk's picturesque dictum

(quoted once before in the earlier part of this book) that a "lie has short legs", it should not be long now before those who attacked Beneš on this score find themselves somewhat out of breath. Many of the provisions of the "Note"—as for example Section 6, which speaks of the local administration being carried on "in the language of the majority of the population"—are open to various interpretations, but certainly there is no promise of making Czechoslovakia "a second Switzerland", as the Germans have consistently alleged.

It would be a mistake, of course, to think of Beneš—or, indeed, of any of the Peace Conference delegates—as animated by motives of pure altruism at Versailles, though Beneš was not, as Wilson thought he was, merely out to grab. Like everybody else, Beneš was naturally determined to get for his country frontiers which put her in the best possible strategical and economic position to face an uncertain future. His, and everybody else's emotions, nerves, and tempers were under the influence of more than four years of war—for the fighting was still going on in many places in spite of the armistices. Indeed most of the Versailles delegates were, in the pungent, if inelegant, phrase of a contemporary *Daily Mail* writer, determined to squeeze the vanquished "until the pips squeaked". All the politicians there assembled (with the possible exception of President Wilson) suffered from this contagion in some degree. But the evidence points to Beneš having had a milder attack than most of his colleagues. At least he did not stand out for impossible reparations as Great Britain and France did, and his territorial demands—even those he put forward officially

on behalf of his Government—were more moderate than those of, say, Rumania, whose Prime Minister, Ion Bratianu, claimed the whole of Hungary up to the outskirts of Belgrade.

The atmosphere of Versailles was so definitely not conducive to moderation that Beneš's own attitude on these issues is all the more remarkable. The negotiations went on solely among the victors. The vanquished were not allowed to appear until the division of the spoils had already been decided upon to the last acre. Frequently, therefore, it was not so much a question of being generous to a beaten foe as not allowing a fellow-conqueror to take something to which his claim was certainly no more valid than yours. Furthermore, old Clemenceau, chief exponent of the squeaking-pip school as well as Permanent Presiding Officer of the Conference, ruled the delegates with a rod of iron, and his influence certainly did not make for leniency towards the Central Powers. On the contrary it tended to twist everybody in the direction of asking for more. But for the fact that most of the details of the territorial settlements were worked out in small committees of civil service experts the majority of whom under very difficult conditions were really doing their best to be fair, the final settlement would undoubtedly have been a good deal more unjust than it actually was. At any rate, so far as the Sudetens were concerned, much as they might dislike being subjected to the Czechs, whom they had dominated for three centuries, there were excellent historical, geographical, strategic, and economic reasons for not radically changing a frontier which after all had stood for a thousand years.

Beneš's first presentation of the Czechoslovak case for the permanent frontiers took him over three and a half hours to deliver. "He dwelt too long on minor points", says Harold Nicolson in *Peacemaking, 1919*, "and after all these *viva voces* are pure farce". Beneš himself has admitted to me that his *tour de force* on this occasion was "a psychological mistake". When it was over, Clemenceau, who generally approved of Beneš and has said so in his Memoirs, went to Kramář and remarked, "Mais il a été d'une longueur, votre Beneš". The worst of Clemenceau, says Nicolson in the book just quoted, "is that he is so terribly audible".

Nicolson, however, like Clemenceau, approved of Beneš, though he criticized his methods and strongly opposed some of his claims. He described Beneš as "an intelligent, young, plausible little man with broad views", who taught him that "the Balance of Power was not necessarily a shameful, but possibly a scientific thing" because "only upon the firm basis of such a balance could the fluids of European amity pass and repass without interruption". As one of the members of the Czech Committee of the Peace Conference, Nicolson had to see a good deal of Beneš. They fought, but amicably in the main, over details of the frontier settlement, lunched together, dined together. "Never have I met so voluble a man", concludes Nicolson. His description of Beneš's personal appearance is equally double-edged—"small, yellow, silly little imperial, intelligent eyes rather like Keynes's, fine forehead", he wrote on one occasion.

It is worth adding that at the time of the Peace Conference, Lloyd George and Beneš were perfectly good

friends, though their personal relations tended to deteriorate later. It is therefore all the more to be regretted that Mr. Lloyd George, who criticizes Beneš so bitterly in *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, did not write his book while the facts were still fresh in his mind and before the course of events had shown that certain parts of the peace system for which he himself was so largely responsible were going to be thrown into the melting-pot.

After the opening session of the Peace Conference on January 18, 1918, plenary sessions were only held when it was desired to ratify decisions previously reached in the committees. At that historic opening in the Quai d'Orsay, Beneš sat between Kramář and the veteran Serbian Prime Minister, Nicola Pashitch. Opposite him was the French statesman, André Tardieu, and immediately behind, Ion Bratianu, Prime Minister of Rumania. It was a scene which impressed Beneš immensely. When, two months earlier, he had ridden through the streets of Paris to sign the Armistice, he had pictured himself as "arriving"; now he felt he had finally arrived, and if the latter state is less exciting it is also definitely more reassuring. In Beneš's case, moreover, it meant that he alone of the statesmen of the new countries had already succeeded in winning the approval of the four Big Powers, France, Great Britain, the United States, Italy, to the frontiers he had been instructed to claim, and throughout the ensuing negotiations, therefore, his chief task would be to hang on to what he had got instead of the far more difficult task of persuading his fellow-statesmen to give him something that might require their help to take.

During the weary months that followed, Beneš was mainly engaged in arguing his case before the Czech Committee to which the Council of Ten had referred the subject of Czechoslovakia's frontiers after that first wordy exposition to which Clemenceau had taken exception. The Committee was no doubt easier to talk to than the Ten, among whom was the indomitable Clemenceau wearing, as Nicolson puts it, "the smile of an irritated, sceptical, and neurasthenic gorilla". But even the Committee was not altogether without its trials for Beneš. There was, for instance, Sir Joseph Cook, the Australian member. One morning, says Nicolson, when an agreed conclusion had at last been reached on the boundaries of Bohemia, Cook was "startled by being asked suddenly by Cambon to record the official view of the British Delegation. 'Well', he says, 'all I can say is that we *are* a happy family, aren't we?'

"An expression of acute agony", Nicolson goes on, "twitches in the face of the interpreter. 'Le premier délégué britannique', he translates nobly, 'constate que nous sommes une famille très heureuse.' There is a silence *pénible*. But old Cook is all right. He has sense. The French the other day started an endless argument about the Delbrück nationality laws. When the whole thing had been translated into English, old Cook was asked to record his views. 'Damn Delbrück', was what he said. And how right, how true! But to the interpreter Sir Joseph is a thorn in the flesh."

There is no doubt he was a thorn in Beneš's flesh also. Beneš with his passion for exactitude, for statistical impeccability and reasoned dissertation, is out of his element

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with the Cooks of this world. This should not necessarily be counted to him for unrighteousness.

The expert members of the Czech Committee and indeed of all the territorial committees, went over the claims with great care in the light of much accurate and some inaccurate information and statistics which had been collected for or by them. They frequently found themselves at variance not only with Beneš, but with one another. They also not infrequently found themselves over-ruled for political reasons by the Big Four. Beneš was happier with the experts than with the politicians. After the first meeting of the Czech Committee, he characteristically produced for Nicolson's benefit "masses of sketch maps designed for the use of children or for the Conseil des Dix", and he explained them with meticulous care while Kramář bombarded Nicolson with propaganda on behalf of his pet proposal for a corridor to link Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

When the Committee was in session, Beneš and Kramář were there merely as witnesses. Their evidence given, they retired and the Committee then argued about it. One member wanted this solution, another that. "Czech sub-committee in the morning", writes Nicolson in his diary under the date March 13, 1919. "We discuss Rumberg and Eger enclaves. The Yanks want to take both away from the Czechs. The French and ourselves oppose this. In order to secure unanimity I agree to give the Yanks Rumberg, if they will give me Eger. This they refuse to do."

Ultimately, however, the Czechs got both districts.

Is it any wonder that when it was all over, Nicolson

wrote: "I am anxious about the future political complexion of the Czech State if they have to digest solid enemy electorates, plus an Irish party in Slovakia, plus a Red party in Ruthenia, to say nothing of their extreme Socialists." Two days later he wrote to his father: ". . . I feel quite dead with it all and so dispirited. It is as though four architects had each designed an entirely different house, and then met round a table to arrive at an agreement, which means, of course, a compromise, in which all the designs are fused into a conglomeration which has no sense or coherence. Even the worst individual design is better than a fusion of four."

In spite of Harold Nicolson's gloomy prognostications, the "conglomeration" with its different nationalities and its multiplication of political parties was for eighteen years by far the most successful, politically free, economically and financially sound State—and the only democracy—among the new States of Central Europe. It was not until the minorities were torn away from the Czech and Slovak majority that the "conglomeration" ceased to have "sense or coherence" and all its components immediately fell under the domination of a German imperialism which was deliberately using the existence of German minorities outside Germany as a cloak for a secret policy of building a colonial empire at the expense of the smaller nationalities of Central and Eastern Europe.

In order to allay the comprehensible qualms of those who feared that the lot of racial minorities under new masters might not be a much happier one than in pre-war days when the rôles were reversed, the Big Four

accepted the idea of the Minority Treaty. In theory the idea was perfect. In practice it was, in my view, a failure. Unlike most of the delegates of the new post-war States, however, Beneš did not register any protest against the Conference's plan to give special protection to the minorities. On the contrary, he was strongly in favour of the idea.

Kramář, on the other hand, opposed it bitterly. It was, of course, in accord with official Czechoslovak policy to grant full protection to minorities. Apart from the proposals in Beneš's "Note", which has already been referred to, Mr. Lloyd George has put it on record that as early as February 5, 1919, when the Peace Conference was still alight with the fires of youthful enthusiasm, Beneš in the course of a plenary session said that "the Czech Government had no intention" of oppressing the German Bohemians. He further quotes Beneš as saying: "It was intended to grant them full minority rights, and it was fully realized that it would be political folly not to do so. All necessary guarantees would be accorded to this minority."

The untoward course of subsequent events has raised doubts about the sincerity of this statement. As we have seen, these doubts are unwarranted. Beneš meant what he said and no doubt the Czechoslovak Government, too, meant what it allowed him to say. Possibly, though rather improbably, all would have been well if the Big Four in their wisdom had not decided they could not trust the good faith of the new States and must therefore place the minorities under the motherly wing of the League of Nations. The result was that most of the States concerned

felt humiliated while the minorities were encouraged to kick against the inevitable pricks by appealing to what they thought was going to be the higher court at Geneva. The Geneva court, being composed mainly of the victor States, never functioned as a Court at all as the minorities thought it would, and most of the States which had given guarantees of good behaviour toward their minorities did not need much encouragement—actually the conduct of the minorities gave them plenty—to drive the inevitable coach and horses through their written obligations.

Beneš, however, thought, and still thinks after the lapse of twenty years, that the minority treaties were essential in order to curb the too enthusiastic nationalism both of majorities and minorities. He holds that placing their relations under the supervision of an impartial body was the only hope of ultimate reconciliation. He admits that the plan failed, but considers that this was more the fault of Europe than of the League. And he insists that the absence of League supervision would have been even more disastrous.

Most people have come to look on the minority treaties as designed solely for the protection of the minorities. This was not Beneš's conception. Three and a half years after that confession of faith at the Plenary Session of the Peace Conference which Mr. Lloyd George has quoted, Beneš invited a Plenary Session of the League Assembly to adopt the following resolution: "The Secretariat, which has the duty of collecting information concerning the manner in which the Minorities Treaties are carried out, should not only assist the Council in the study of complaints concerning infractions of these Treaties, but should

also assist the Council in ascertaining in what manner the persons belonging to racial, linguistic, or religious minorities fulfil their duties towards their States." But the very fact that it was necessary thus to underline the duties of the minorities toward the majorities shows that the system was already creaking. Actually the greater part of Beneš's post-war political life up to the Munich debacle in 1938 was concerned with one aspect or another of this Minority issue. And in the end it proved too much for him.

The only important sphere at Versailles in which the Czechoslovak delegation was allowed to appear as a principal—not counting the formal Plenary Sessions of the Peace Conference—was in the Committee which drafted the Covenant for the League of Nations. Admission of the Czechs to this august body was the result of a rebellion of the small States against the Clemenceau tyranny. Early in February they held a private protest meeting at the Quai d'Orsay and decided to ask for four more seats on the Committee preparing the Covenant. They got their way and Greece, Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia were the four chosen. Even so, the four Big Powers with two votes each had a majority of one over the seven Small Powers with one vote each. It cannot be said, therefore, that Czechoslovakia's influence on the League Committee was of vital importance for the future of that institution.

In view of the big part Beneš afterwards played in League affairs, it is rather ironical that the Czech delegate on the League Committee should have been Kramář. By the very nature of things, Kramář's contribution could

not be spectacular. To him, however, belongs the distinction of having been the only delegate to support the French plea, put forward with passionate zeal, for an international police force. The French insisted that moral force and economic blockades would never suffice to stop a war-monger. They made no secret of their fear that one day Germany would attack them again and they urged that the only way to meet this danger was for the League to have its own international military organization and international General Staff which would be able to take all the necessary defensive measures to prevent any new German aggression. The discussion went on for days. But in the end only the two Frenchmen and Kramář voted for it. It is a project which was certainly as dear to Beneš's heart as to anybody's at the Peace Conference, but he has always realized that it was impracticable. Years later, when he helped Ramsay MacDonald and Edouard Herriot draft the famous 1924 Geneva Protocol for the settlement of international disputes, he made no attempt to revive the international police force.

The Treaty of Peace with Germany was not signed till June 28, 1919—seven and a half months after the Armistice. The Treaty of St. Germain with Austria came two and a half months later still (September 1919); the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary was not finally signed till June 4, 1920, a whole year and seven months after major hostilities had ended. During the intervening period, Beneš had almost more to worry him than during the war years. Then he was mostly engaged in spade work; afterwards he had to turn to and prevent the beaten enemy from undermining the edifice he had built up. In the war

years it was he that had been attacking; afterwards—at any rate from the days when he persuaded the Big Four in Paris to repudiate General Franchet d'Esperey's Belgrade armistice terms—he was almost all the time obliged to defend.

All his elaborately thought out plans nearly went by the board in March 1919, when the Karolyi Government in Hungary resigned in despair at the provisional frontiers it had been ordered to accept, and a Bolshevik Government under Bela Kun took its place. It was not that the Allies liked Bela Kun better than Karolyi—far from it. But Bela Kun was prepared to show fight and the Big Four in Paris were not, though like other statesmen since their day they sometimes pretended they were. First they sent a mission under General Smuts to parley with him. So far as Hungary itself was concerned, Smuts returned with nothing more concrete than a feeling of contempt for Bela Kun and all his works. On his way home, however, he went at Lloyd George's request to see Masaryk in Prague, and he came away convinced that he had secured from the Czechoslovak President an admission that he personally would prefer to waive all claims to the Magyar population in the Grosse Schütt island north of the Danube in exchange for a bridgehead of Hungarian territory south of the Danube opposite Bratislava.

The Smuts-Masaryk conversation gave Beneš considerable trouble. He was convinced that Smuts had misunderstood Masaryk, and his conviction was completely confirmed after an exchange of letters with his chief. Fortified and reassured by this correspondence Beneš

explained to the Czech Committee that the President had not said that he himself wanted to give up the Danube frontier; he had merely stated quite objectively that "*some people* in Czechoslovakia thought this would be a good arrangement, but that the Czechoslovak Government thought it would be a very bad arrangement. . . ." Harold Nicolson, who did know of Masaryk's written confirmation, thus records Beneš's interpretation in his Diary, and adds: "This, I fear is untrue. It increases my dislike of Kramarsh, who is behind everything nasty that Beneš does." For once, however, Beneš and Kramář were in accord. What is more, they won their point. Three days later, Nicolson added a disgusted postscript: "We are forced to give way. The Czechs will have their Magyars and their island. I do not feel it to be a wise decision: but I have done my best." The two Czech delegates, however, and their Government with them knew that any other solution would have caused deep dissatisfaction among the Slovaks and would probably have led to serious quarrels in their own ranks.

Incidentally, the Czechs, or, more accurately, the Slovaks, got their Bratislava bridgehead, too, only to lose it again—not to Hungary but to Germany—in the post-Munich settlement of 1938. Hitler alleged, which is true, that the inhabitants of this district have always been mainly Germans. But the bridgehead, whatever its racial characteristics, also controls the river port of Bratislava. Its loss is galling to the Slovaks for another reason—it contained the Slovak as well as the Hungarian and German boat clubs of Bratislava which have always been much frequented by the young athletes of the Slovak capital.

But it is time to return to Bela Kun. Shortly after he had refused the terms offered him by Smuts, he invaded Slovakia. Accordingly Marshal Foch was publicly asked to draw up a plan for combined action against Hungary. But the Council of Four had no wish for further military adventures and they privately refused to put the Foch plan into execution, although Hungary was completely surrounded by a cordon of French, Serbian, Czechoslovak, Rumanian, and Italian troops. The Czechs themselves were disorganized. Conditions inside the country were appalling, with one in five of the babies born dead and two in five dying before they were a month old. General Štefánik was still in Paris—it was when flying home to try to stem the Bela Kun invasion that he lost his life—and General Syrový with the bulk of the Legionaries was not yet home from Vladivostok.

In all these circumstances, it is not surprising that Bela Kun's invasion of Slovakia met with such success—so much success, in fact, that the Big Four, knowing that he was in touch with Lenin, tried to buy him off lest Bolshevism should gain a strong foothold in the very heart of Europe. Early in June 1919, therefore, they sent him a studiously mild Note merely requesting him to stop his offensive against the Czechoslovaks and at the same time, as the Official History phrases it, "virtually inviting him to Paris", with the evident intention of bargaining with him at Czechoslovakia's expense.

Beneš, outwardly unperturbed, went on his accustomed way of piling argument upon argument in order to establish his point of view by sheer weight of intellectual metal. Five days later—on June 13th—he had managed to

persuade the Peace Conference to agree to the formal publication of the permanent boundaries of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, Bela Kun's supply services had given out and his offensive came to a full stop in consequence. Shortly afterwards, however, to Beneš's great relief, he was short-sighted enough to start an attack in another direction—against Rumania. This if successful would have given him direct access to Bolshevik Russia, and so was a much more serious business than his attempt to overrun Slovakia. The Rumanians were therefore both encouraged and helped to resist. They did so with such success that within a few weeks they had occupied Budapest and even made contact with the Czechoslovak forces in Slovakia. The latter took advantage of the Hungarian debacle to reoccupy the paper frontier Beneš had won in Paris. Bela Kun fled to Moscow where he supposedly still is—unless in the meantime he has come under one of Stalin's periodic purges.

The rout of Bela Kun took place early in August 1919—five weeks after the Treaty of Versailles was signed. A few weeks later, Beneš found the situation in Paris so much simplified that he was at last able to go home. He reached Prague on September 24th—a fortnight after he had signed the Peace Treaty with Austria and four years and twenty-three days after he had fled from his country as a rather insignificant conspirator. Though he was generally welcomed with great enthusiasm by his compatriots who acclaimed the work he had accomplished on their behalf both during the war and at the Peace Conference, some of the more intransigent were already displaying dissatisfaction at his attitude, notably in regard

to the concessions made to Poland in Teschen. So incensed were some of them that when shortly afterwards he left Prague once more for Paris, a hostile demonstration was organized against him at the railway station, and he had to be smuggled out of reach of the demonstrators to avoid a riot. His characteristic reply was to accept the decision of the Ambassadors Conference for the division of Teschen when he arrived back in Paris.

Infancy and Adolescence

YOUNG HUMANS generally divide the early months of their life between eating, sleeping, and objecting to being bathed. For young States, however, existence is less simple. There is apt, in the first place, to be violent disagreement among its political nurses about its mode of life. In the second place, there are generally several wolves around to gobble it up if the nurses show any signs of carelessness.

Czechoslovakia was fortunate in both respects. There was the mellow wisdom of Masaryk to prevent unwise political nostrums being administered internally; there was the experienced vigilance of Beneš to guard against dangers from without. Masaryk presided over the deliberations which gave Czechoslovakia a Constitution that in theory and to a large extent in practice was thoroughly democratic. Beneš worked out the intricate permutations and combinations which prudence dictated if the young State was to enjoy external security.

The chief danger from without at this time was Hungary. As we have seen, it took the Allies nearly a year longer to bring little Hungary to accept the humiliation of a dictated peace than it had taken them in the case of the great State of Germany. And from the outset the Hungarians made it abundantly clear that they had not the slightest intention of accepting the crippling

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Treaty of Trianon as final. Indeed, between the suspension of hostilities in November 1918 and July 26, 1921, when the Hungarian Parliament finally ratified the Treaty, Hungary engaged in warlike operations twice against the Czechs and once against the Rumanians, staged one Bolshevik and one "White" terror and engineered two attempts by the exiled Emperor Charles to regain his throne. This uncompromising attitude continued even after the Treaty of Trianon had been ratified, for exactly two months after having thus appeared to bow to the inevitable, Hungary refused to evacuate the Burgenland which the Allies in their wisdom had allocated to Hungary's comrade in misfortune, Austria. Only a stern ultimatum brought submission.

In such circumstances it was regrettably inevitable that Beneš should at once have had to set to work to build a diplomatic wall round Hungary. Indeed, foreseeing the probability of trouble from Hungary, he started negotiations in Paris to this end even before the Armistice was signed. But it was nearly two years before they finally fructified in the famous Little Entente formed by Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania. In its inception, the Little Entente was conceived by Beneš primarily as an insurance policy against Hungary. It was quite deliberately an attempt to keep Hungary down. But when we feel disposed to criticize it on this account, let us remember that neither Beneš nor Masaryk ever intended the keeping down process to go on for ever. At the back of their minds was always the hope that one day there would be co-operation between the races of Central Europe—that they would in fact

federate along the lines of Masaryk's Declaration of Independence.¹

Beneš, with others, has to take his share of the blame for the failure to take the process beyond the unprofitable, if salutary, stage of repressions. Whether his share is a major one or a minor will be for the reader to judge as the stages of Beneš's post-war career are unfolded. Meanwhile, let it merely be recorded here that he was the first Central European statesman to offer to start negotiations with Hungary for a friendly settlement. This was in 1921, before the first of Emperor Charles's two attempts to regain the Hungarian throne. Again, in 1923, when Hungary was economically down and out, Beneš was the only Central European statesman who supported the Hungarian initiative in urging the League to come to the rescue. On several occasions afterwards he sought to develop better relations with the Hungarians. But the Hungarians, whether it was that they mistrusted his motives or that they could not bring themselves even to consider the concessions he demanded of them, never responded.

The Little Entente began merely as a Treaty of Alliance between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which Beneš signed at Belgrade on August 14, 1920. From Belgrade he immediately went on to Bucharest, where he persuaded the Rumanian Government to agree that, pending the conclusion of a similar treaty, Czechoslovakia and Rumania would assist one another in case of an unprovoked attack by Hungary. In the following April the Czechoslovak-Rumanian Treaty of Alliance was signed.

¹ See pages 121, 122.

In the main it was identical with the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav Treaty, but with one significant addition: "For the purpose of co-ordinating their efforts to maintain peace (so runs Article Four), the two Governments undertake to consult together on questions of foreign policy concerning their relations with Hungary."

During the intervening months, Beneš and his friend, Take Ionescu, the Rumanian statesman, were both busy propagandizing in various capitals in favour of the Little Entente. Ionescu went to Rome, Paris, and London and then on to Warsaw, where he tried, but without success, to persuade Poland to join the other heirs of the Habsburg Empire. Beneš went, among other places, to Rome, where he induced the Italian Government to extend to Czechoslovakia the benefits of a recent treaty between Italy and Yugoslavia in which the two States promised to take concerted (diplomatic, not military) action to prevent a Habsburg restoration in either Austria or Hungary.

Within a month, the new arrangements which Beneš had sponsored were put to the test. At the very moment that Czechoslovak and Hungarian representatives were meeting to try to solve their more pressing difficulties, the ex-Emperor Charles made his first descent on Hungary, disregarding a warning Beneš had publicly given that any attempt at restoration "would constitute for certain of Hungary's neighbours a veritable *casus belli*". Beneš had added on that occasion that "95 per cent of the difficulties with neighbouring States would disappear the moment that those neighbours of the Hungary of to-day found evidence of an evolution in the direction of democracy and republicanism which would reassure them on the

question of her internal régime". In view of this categorical advance notice of what Hungary might expect if she did not at once abjure the Habsburgs and all their works, it was not surprising that within three days after Charles's arrival on Hungarian soil, Beneš instructed the Czechoslovak Minister to inform the Hungarian Government that there would be an economic blockade if Charles did not leave immediately, and that in the last resort there would be a joint "military demonstration" by the Little Entente States. He followed this up by an ultimatum that these measures would be put into force without further warning if Charles had not left Hungary within four days. He had this ultimatum delivered although in the meantime Charles had actually gone back to Switzerland. It may be added that in spite of statements which have been published to the contrary, Beneš maintains that the proposed military demonstration was to have been a joint affair by all three Little Entente States; that although two of these States did not actually send Hungary a notification of their intention to participate, the decision was made jointly by all three acting in concert; and that he himself was acting on behalf of all three States after having been expressly authorized to do so.

Why was Beneš so implacably opposed to a Habsburg restoration? Undoubtedly it was because of Slovakia. In those early days of the union between Czechs and Slovaks, the attitude of the Slovaks as junior partners was, to say the least, uncertain. Hungarian leaders were loudly demanding the old frontiers of the Hungarian State and the demand, if granted, would have given the whole of

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Slovakia back to Hungary. For Czechoslovakia, the word "Habsburg" was simply another name for "revisionism", and denoted new territorial claims by Hungary and perhaps by Austria too. Fortunately for Beneš and the Czechs, Hungary besides her claims in regard to Slovakia was also claiming most of Rumania down to the Black Sea, and a large part of Yugoslavia including the Adriatic littoral, not to mention the port of Fiume, which the Yugoslavs considered should be theirs but which that dynamic poet, Gabriel d'Annunzio, ultimately seized for Italy. But whereas these wider Hungarian claims were at that time somewhat chimerical, the claim that Beneš had to meet constituted a real and present danger, because a certain proportion of the uneducated Slovaks could be influenced by clever propaganda in favour of Hungary. They were accustomed to leaving their mountain homes in summer to work in the Hungarian plains, and they did not relish losing what seemed to them their best means of livelihood. A certain number of the educated Slovaks were still more reluctant because they had been brought up in Hungarian schools, spoke Hungarian, and regarded Budapest as the centre of their existence. Later on, the merits of the tolerant régime instituted by the Czechs began to seem so vastly preferable to the feudal and repressive tendencies of the old Hungary that the attraction of Budapest steadily diminished. Thereafter first Yugoslavia and then Rumania took the lead in opposing the return of the Habsburg dynasty. It is also worth pointing out that Germany was always so bitterly opposed to a Habsburg restoration that neither Austria nor Hungary ever dared to put such a proposal forward officially

however much campaigning on behalf of Otto may have been carried on unofficially by their Governments and private individuals. In spite of this a legend was manufactured, and was believed by many who should have known better, that Beneš was solely responsible for preventing the Habsburgs' return. It is true that Beneš was, and is, anti-Habsburg—partly because he is a staunch republican. But the Karageorgevitch dynasty in Yugoslavia was considerably stiffer in its opposition than Beneš, the reason being that it was not too sure of the loyalty of the Croats to the new Yugoslav State. During the years immediately preceding the demise of the Little Entente, Belgrade was inclined to suspect Beneš of having become pro-Habsburg. The suspicion was unfounded. But even if there had been every justification for it, Beneš would certainly not have voiced such a view, because if he had done so he would immediately have smashed the Little Entente. In a word, the Habsburg problem was of such a complicated character that the legend that Beneš decided it off his own bat can only be described as nonsense.

In recent years, Beneš has often been quoted, and misquoted, on this subject of a Habsburg restoration. I have tried to track down some of the things he is supposed to have said, notably the dictum attributed to him: "Better the *Anschluss* than the Habsburgs." I have been unable to trace this phrase or anything remotely resembling it in any of Beneš's speeches, writings, or interviews. And I have been assured by those who are in the best possible position to know, that Beneš could not possibly have made such a statement because his view has never changed that these two solutions of the Central European problem,

Anschluss and a Habsburg restoration, would both be equally disastrous for European peace and for the hope of collaboration of the Central European States themselves in a system of mildly preferential tariffs which would cement close political co-operation.

In the interval between Charles's first descent on Hungary in March 1920, and his second in October 1921, Beneš made several fruitless efforts to reach an understanding with Hungary. The Hungarians blamed the failure on him. But seeing that most Hungarians have always looked upon the Czechs as beneath contempt, it is at least possible that they were mistaken. Be that as it may, Charles's second attempt to regain the Crown of St. Stephen led to such an acrimonious dispute between Czechoslovakia and Hungary that reconciliation became out of the question. Seventeen years later, when the Munich award began the remaking of the map of Central Europe, the fire of mutual antipathies between them was still smouldering and the end is not yet.

Beneš—acting expressly on behalf of the three countries of the Little Entente—certainly took the lead in the moves which drove the unfortunate ex-Emperor from his patrimony for the last time. Although the Hungarian Government had arrested Charles, Beneš, as Little Entente spokesman, sent a Note—this time he addressed the Allied Governments as well as Hungary—declaring that the mere presence of the ex-Emperor on Hungarian soil constituted a *casus belli* and announcing that Czechoslovakia was preparing to mobilize. He added that even if Charles himself were sent into exile, the necessary steps would be taken in conjunction with the other

members of the Little Entente "in order to obtain the final settlement of the Habsburg question in Hungary and to avert once and for all the danger created by the House of Habsburg in Central Europe". The next day he went one better and informed the Allies that the Little Entente States counted on their support, and that they were in no mood for "half-measures". He also sent for the Hungarian Minister in Prague and gave him what almost amounted to a verbal ultimatum, though he denies hotly that it was anything of the sort. Technically, he is undoubtedly right. An ultimatum is a written document with a time limit. Beneš's demands were put forward verbally and had no time limit. But the effect was indistinguishable. Hungary was left in no doubt as to what would happen if she refused. Beneš insisted on the final surrender of any idea of a Habsburg restoration and payment of the costs of the Czechoslovak mobilization. Hungary appealed to the Allies for protection, but the only effect of this was that through the good offices of the Allies Beneš got the substance of all he asked for except the indemnity. Moreover, by persuading the Allies to urge Hungary to submit, he got it without having to use military force or even to break diplomatic relations with Hungary.

Beneš himself has described these events as "a struggle for future tranquillity and peace", adding that "our democratic policy, having for its object the consolidation and peace of Central Europe, and also our policy of treaty-making, has entirely justified itself. Europe has at last recognized this." No doubt it looked like that not only at the time, but even three years later in 1924 when these words were spoken. With the greater wisdom of

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seventeen added years, however, we know that though he was right in his description of what the struggle was about, he was wrong in suggesting that the problem had been finally solved. But there can be no question that the alternatives he had to choose between were either to cow Hungary by the threat of overwhelming force or to acquiesce in the return of a dynasty pledged to dismember the three Little Entente countries and de-nationalize the fragments. The choice for Beneš was between overt and covert Hungarian hostility, not between hostility and friendship. His one hope of winning Hungarian friendship lay in surrendering all the territory that Czechoslovakia had taken from Hungary and allowing its Slav population to be swallowed up by the Magyars. It never was practical politics for him to do so.

During the years that followed the second Charles *putsch*, Beneš kept on negotiating with Hungary, sometimes through the medium of bilateral talks, sometimes through the intermediary of the League of Nations. One by one a number of acrimonious disputes arising out of the terms of the Treaty of Trianon were solved. But the deeper antipathy remained although early in 1924 Beneš was able to tell the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament that the relations between the two countries had become "almost normal". Rashly he added a prophecy. The time is approaching, he said, "when a reasonable agreement can be concluded with that country and when the Little Entente will no longer be directed against Hungary, just as it has ceased to be directed against Austria".

Beneš went on: "Thus will be realized the organization

of Central Europe upon which we have so often insisted, an organization consisting in the creation of a new political and economic system in which all the countries of Central Europe will preserve their full sovereignty; it is an organization in which, let us hope, all the present divergencies of opinion will disappear in order to make room for collaboration." In this sentence we have not merely the reiteration of the federal ideal which Masaryk outlined in his wartime Declaration of Independence, but a clear indication of the gulf between the Masaryk-Beneš concept of the way to organize Central Europe and the Hitlerian plan of subject races under the domination of the Reich.

After Hungary, Beneš's greatest problem during these early years was the dispute with Poland over Teschen. At Versailles, he had failed to persuade the Big Four (Clemenceau, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Orlando) to give Czechoslovakia this coveted area, and had finally agreed that there should be a plebiscite. Not long afterwards, however, Marshal Pilsudski's Ukrainian adventure nearly involved Poland in irretrievable disaster. In order to strengthen their position and gain the support of the Allies against the Soviets, the Poles accepted the Allied proposal to let the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris decide whose infant the child Teschen really was. The ambassadorial Solomon in its wisdom dissected the body in a way that gave the smaller part of the territory with important coal-mines and the Teschen iron industry to Czechoslovakia, and left Poland holding the greater agricultural and less valuable part of the baby.

Beneš has been constantly and very severely criticized in

his own country on the Teschen question. For many years it was considered as his great failure. It is true that Poland never reconciled herself to Solomon's award. It is equally true that vivisection created a small Polish minority of some seventy thousand in Czechoslovakia. But it is also true that in 1938, when the Sudetenlands were handed over to Germany in the Munich *Diktat* and Poland took advantage of Czechoslovakia's agony to reverse the Ambassadors' decision of seventeen years previously, Poland was not merely content with taking the whole of Teschen and re-establishing sovereignty over the Polish minority. She also took territory inhabited by 123,000 Czechs and Slovaks and 23,000 Germans. Two blacks do not make a white. But it is at least clear that Beneš's realism was much less predatory than Poland's—if indeed Beneš's action was predatory at all, which is doubtful. Czechoslovakia needed the industrial products of the Teschen region, particularly its coal, of which Poland had more than enough without Teschen.

Nevertheless, Beneš has frankly admitted that there was "not enough understanding" either on his side or on Poland's in this and the other lesser matters in dispute between them.

The fruits of this lack of understanding were not visible for many years, but in the end they proved disastrous for both Czechoslovakia and Poland. It was vital for the security of both countries that when Germany recovered not only her strength but her expansionist ambition they should be on the best possible terms with one another. Czechoslovak industrial power plus Polish man-power would have been able to present a very strong front

against any attempt by Germany to interfere with the liberty of either State. Instead, the two countries each went their own separate ways. Poland made a pact of friendship with Germany in 1934 and Czechoslovakia made one with Russia in 1935. Poland was suspicious of Czechoslovakia's friendship with Russia, Czechoslovakia of Poland's leaning toward Germany. The fissure between the two policies was enlarged by the personal dislike which existed between Beneš and his opposite number in Warsaw, Colonel Beck. Beneš, the idealist who firmly believed that the one hope of peace for Europe was a combination of the democratic and peace-loving States to resist aggression, had nothing in common with Beck the cynic who distrusted the Polish alliance with France as a means of saving Polish independence, and who was prepared to make friends with any mammon, however unrighteous, if he thought it in the immediate interests of Poland to do so. Subsequent events have proved them both to have been right and both wrong. Beneš's policy of collective security broke down whenever it was put to the test; Beck's rejection of collective security helped to bring about the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Germany and thus placed Poland at the mercy of the Reich. It is too early yet to apportion the responsibility between the two men. I have heard Beneš say most earnestly how anxious he was to come to terms with Poland, and I have time and again heard Polish diplomats say how anxious Beck was to come to terms with Czechoslovakia. As a matter of historical record let it be stated here that Beneš tried to reach a final agreement with the Poles in 1932-33 on two or three occasions, when he offered them a treaty of

permanent friendship as a starting-point for the development of really cordial relationships; that he did so again shortly after he became President when, through the French High Command, he proposed Czech-Polish collaboration against the danger of war in Central Europe; and that he made yet a third effort when he very strongly desired and supported the plan for Polish participation in the so-called Eastern Pact which France, the U.S.S.R., and Czechoslovakia were trying to organize against the possibility of aggression in Central and Eastern Europe.

It seems that in each case the price Poland asked was too heavy for Beneš to accept. But what that price was and why it was asked will not be known until a good deal of careful historical research has been applied to a number of documents which have not yet become available to the public. It will be necessary to know a good deal more than we do now about the reasons which impelled Poland to refuse to conclude a treaty which if it had been in force might have averted the disasters of 1938 and 1939 which have culminated in a European war on a scale unparalleled in history. One of the arguments I have heard Poles use to justify their attitude is that when Hitler re-militarized the Rhineland they offered to join France in a war to turn him out again, and that France's refusal to fight even for her own frontiers convinced them that the two Western democracies had decided to wash their hands of Europe east of the Rhine in spite of the Franco-Czech and Franco-Polish alliances and the League Covenant. The conclusion the Poles drew was that they had better keep on good terms with Hitler as long as they could. When, therefore, Hitler decided to carve up

Czechoslovakia, Poland decided to take what she could get, in the hope of strengthening herself for the onslaught against herself which she felt was bound to follow. If that is the only reason the Polish Government had for refusing Beneš's offer of friendship, it seems a short-sighted one. Actually, it would clearly have been worth Poland's while to hand over the whole of its part of Teschen to Czechoslovakia if that had been (which it was not) the only way to get an alliance with the Czechs. It may also be that the converse is almost equally true, namely that Czechoslovakia would have been well advised to surrender its part of Teschen in order to gain the permanent friendship of Poland even though to have done so would have created many serious economic and some strategical difficulties for the Czechs without bring corresponding advantages to the Poles. For this reason alone, the chief blame seems to rest with Beck, not with Beneš. And it may well be that historical research will bring documents to light which will enable us to exonerate Beneš still more completely—especially as there can be no doubt at all that Czechoslovakia's claim to the greater part of Teschen was justified on every ground except perhaps that arising from the fact that Poland was the stronger State and coveted it.

Already in the years immediately following Versailles Beneš had worked assiduously to whittle away the minor troubles which grew out of these major issues. Germany was still prostrate and the Sudetens were quiet—all the more so because from the very morrow of the peace treaties Beneš succeeded in establishing quite good relations with Austria. The Sudetens, except a few

thousand of them, were one and all ex-Austrians, not ex-Germans. Within a few months of signing the Treaty of St. Germain the Presidents of Austria and Czechoslovakia exchanged visits and by December 16, 1921, the two countries had negotiated a pact of friendship pledging them to economic co-operation and the compulsory arbitration of all disputes which they were unable to settle through ordinary diplomatic channels. Czechoslovakia also participated in the various League loans to put Austria on her feet again.

With Poland, for the first few years, events also shaped themselves fairly satisfactorily. Poland at that time was under a democratic form of government, as were Austria and Czechoslovakia. For a time there was even a prospect that Beneš would succeed where Ionescu failed and induce Poland to enter the Little Entente. On various occasions, and especially at the Genoa Conference in 1922 for the readmission of Bolshevik Russia into the fold of European respectability, Beneš and his opposite numbers in Warsaw, Skirmunt and Narutowicz, found it possible to co-operate very closely. Two years later, in February 1924, in a speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament outlining his foreign policy since the end of the war, Beneš particularly stressed the collaboration which had already taken place and his desire to reach a complete understanding with Poland "before the entry of the new Russia into European politics". Beneš added, in words which foretold the problems that arose eleven years later out of the Russo-Czechoslovak Pact: "The situation is such that an understanding will be so much the more difficult when Russia intervenes more actively

in European affairs, and it will be more difficult for all of us, for ourselves, for Poland, and for Russia. It seems that this has not been understood in time and sufficiently, either in Czechoslovakia or in Poland." Beneš was, perhaps, animated by the same considerations in 1932-33, when he tried again to come to an agreement with Poland because he wanted to settle all outstanding problems with Poland before Russia entered the League of Nations in 1934. The warning fell on deaf ears. Russia came back to intervene "more actively" in European affairs and Beneš made friends with her while Poland, remembering the agonies of her hundred and fifty years of partition, held aloof. In 1926, Marshal Pilsudski overthrew the democratic régime in Poland and established an indirect personal dictatorship. More and more, the Governments in Warsaw and Prague began to see their problems through different-coloured spectacles. The Teschen dispute was resuscitated with ever-increasing acrimony on both sides as an outward and visible sign that the two countries were drifting into opposite camps. Thus with unwitting deliberation, the decks were cleared for the fast-reviving might of Germany to assert itself.

Beneš's speech on February 6, 1924, from which an extract has just been quoted, contains so much that is illuminating about his policy during the early post-war years that it is worth looking at more closely. "Our principles of foreign policy", Beneš told the Foreign Affairs Committee, "issued and issue from our faith in democracy, from resistance to every absolutism and autocracy in all its medieval survivals; we believe in respecting the human personality in everyone and every-

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where, and in our policy we are guided by this principle. We condemn oppression in every shape and form, whether it be the material oppression incorporated in the Governments of the old pre-war régime or the material or spiritual oppression practised in our own days in the exaggerations of nationalism, or of sheer revolutionism and terrorism. We know that among the nations there are and will be conflicts of interest and opinions, but we want such disputes to be settled on democratic lines, that is by agreement and the struggle of ideas, by arguments, by the exercise of reason, and in general by methods which are permeated with the spirit of humanity."

It is one of the tragic ironies of history that these are precisely the same sort of sentiments which Mr. Chamberlain expressed when he signed the agreement at Munich placing Czechoslovakia at the mercy of the most ruthless nationalism and absolutism in modern times, and opening the way for the reduction of the Czech race to a far worse form of slavery than the one it had escaped from when the Habsburg Empire was destroyed exactly twenty years before.

After elaborating the general principles of his foreign policy, Beneš went on to discuss their application. He admitted that "the Peace Treaties are imperfect", a fact which "everyone knows and recognizes". But, he went on, "they are to-day the juridical basis of the political structure of Europe. Their non-recognition or their alteration would mean calling forth new confusion and a new desperate and bloody struggle." On this theory—that maintenance intact of the Peace Treaties was the lesser of two

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evils—Beneš based his policy of endeavouring “in a positive fashion to get rid of the smaller disputed points between us and our neighbours, and also to strengthen, by constructive work and the drawing up of agreements with friendly States, the new structure of Europe so that all those who believe that warlike and other ventures are able to overturn the present political order may be induced to abandon such ideas.

“That”, he added, “was the origin of the idea of constructing a League of States by means of regional and restricted agreements so as to strengthen the present juridical system and hinder the breaking out of warlike conflicts.”

Beneš justified these regional agreements, of which he was, if not the originator at any rate one of the earliest sponsors, on the ground of the weakness of the League of Nations. On this question, his speech contains several highly instructive passages. Voices have been heard, he said, in favour of the thesis that Czechoslovakia should follow Switzerland's policy and “strive at the complete neutralization of the Republic and seek support only in the League”. To this Beneš replied that a policy of guaranteed neutrality “would naturally imply a policy of treaties. It is only a question of who would conclude such treaties with us and what practical value they would have. It is superfluous to point out that to-day it would be quite impossible to find anyone to guarantee our integrity without some obligations being entered into on our part. How could we demand such a thing from France or from England? Apart from that, the very idea itself is sadly compromised after the experience of Belgium.”

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The real fact was that no guarantee could possibly be fully effective unless Germany was one of the guarantors and Great Britain, France, and Russia the others. At no period from the time the Peace Treaties were signed until the temporary extinction of Czechoslovak liberty in 1939 was it practical politics to negotiate for a solution of 'Czechoslovakia's difficulties on this basis because, until Czechoslovakia had been wiped off the map, Great Britain steadfastly refused to entertain any commitment east of the Rhine. In law, of course, every single member of the League of Nations, including Great Britain, was pledged under Article 10 of the League Covenant to "respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence" of Czechoslovakia. In practice, successive British Governments always treated this obligation as having no binding force although it is an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles and therefore of exactly the same calibre as the famous "scrap of paper" treaty of 1839 which Germany tore up when she entered Belgium at the beginning of the war in 1914. Those who say otherwise are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them.

Already in 1924, however, Beneš realized that the League Covenant could not be relied upon to save Czechoslovakia from external aggression. "I am not of those who look with scepticism on the League of Nations", he said in that speech of February 6th, "but on the other hand, I do not overestimate its forces to-day, and I make therefore all the greater effort to strengthen it and enable it actually to become what its founders wished it to be." He considered that the League possessed "considerable moral force

which, so far, could only be converted with great difficulty—and only in very special circumstances—into material force.

"It is common knowledge", he went on, "that two years ago the League was unable to intervene in the Greco-Turkish War, while the events connected with the occupation of Corfu are well known."

Beneš's opposition to Italy's action in the Corfu incident when she bombarded this Greek island and then virtually demanded (and obtained) an indemnity from the Greek Government for having done so, was the beginning of the estrangement between Czechoslovakia and Italy which lasted right through the years until it culminated in strident Italian support for the dismemberment of the Czechoslovak Republic at the time of the Sudeten crisis.

Throughout his career as Foreign Secretary of Czechoslovakia, Beneš stood up for the rights of the small States against the domination of the Great Powers—as he did in the case of the Corfu incident. For this reason he fought strongly against any weakening of Article 10 of the League Covenant. "Among the members of the League of Nations and also outside the League there exists to-day strong tendencies towards an alteration of Article 10, that is, just the article which should provide a guarantee for the small States. . . . It is asserted that the entry of the United States and perhaps also the membership of other countries [he meant Germany] depends upon an alteration of Article 10." In his opinion, the League was already too weak to permit of its Covenant being further emasculated. "The statutes of the League of Nations themselves", he said, "lay down that the opposition of a single

member of the Council suffices—in the case of an attack by one State on another—to prevent the League from calling upon all its members to assist the State attacked, and suffices to cause the attacked State to be left to its fate or to throw it back on the assistance of such States as may wish to help and which have some close connection with the attacked party.”

These considerations, in Beneš's view, justified his policy of regional alliances of which the Little Entente was the first and most important. But the Little Entente was only one cog in a much bigger piece of machinery which Beneš hoped to construct in the end. He wanted not merely the security against Hungary which was the limited purpose of the Little Entente, but general security all round. When, one after the other, his attempts to construct such a system failed, he was driven to try to change the Little Entente into a pact of mutual assistance of Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia in the case of aggression from Germany. It goes without saying that he asked this guarantee only in conjunction with the guarantee France had already given in favour of all three States of the Little Entente. But he was never able to surmount the objections of Czechoslovakia's two partners, each of whom felt that to guarantee Czechoslovakia's integrity against German aggression was asking for trouble even in connection with the guarantee given them by France. No doubt they were right, though ultimately they found that it was asking for still more trouble not to give the guarantee for which Beneš pressed them so often. But it is perhaps comprehensible that, in the pre-*Anschluss* and pre-Munich eras when Germany was still

a long way away from their own borders, they should have demurred at giving a promise of protection to a State whose frontiers marched with Germany's for six hundred miles. However that may be, the utmost that Beneš was able to make of the Little Entente beyond its Hungarian aspect was an embryonic economic and cultural co-operative society. If all had gone well, the central economic institute and other permanent organizations of the Little Entente which were established in Prague through the insistence of Beneš might ultimately have played an important rôle in building up the Central European Federation of which Masaryk and Beneš dreamed. But German militarism shook off its shackles too soon, and the whole idea went to pieces. In its stead came a revival in a new form of the German *Mittel Europa*—a *Mittel Europa* based on the principle that everybody else's affairs were to be ordered for Germany's benefit, that race equality was a myth, and the superiority of the Teuton unquestionable, that if Germany wanted something she had the right to take it, and that this "right" to a "living space" for Germany and Germans automatically superseded even the most legitimate and harmless interests of other races.

The regional alliances by means of which Beneš sought to guard against this danger which he had seen so clearly in pre-war days and which he hoped to banish for ever were based not only on the League of Nations, but also on the Anglo-French Entente which he said over and over again he would do his best "to maintain at all costs". In that same speech of February 1924 from which so many extracts have already been given here, he declared that

"the Anglo-French alliance, in the difficult times in which we now live, means peace and quiet in Europe, means that all other countries have to group around this *bloc*, and means the extension of that alliance into an all-European Entente".

Beneš continued to hope and to work for this extension of the Anglo-French alliance right up to the last hours at Munich. He could put no trust in a Central Europe so organized that it was left in effect to the mercy of Germany. He was utterly convinced that the only way the peace of Europe could be made permanent was for Great Britain and France to be ready to curb Germany's propensity to dominate her smaller neighbours whenever she felt strong enough to do so. This, to him, was so axiomatic that he found it hard to imagine how any non-German could think otherwise.

A typical example of Beneš's efforts to secure his "all-European Entente" is seen in the Genoa Conference of May 1922. To quote, almost for the last time, from that 1924 speech, "Mr. Lloyd George, as is well known, laid before the Conference the plan of a guarantee pact, which contained no other guarantee than the mere promise that one party would not attack another. I regarded this as inadequate and proposed as a basis of European peace, a Franco-English guarantee pact which should afterwards be extended to become an inter-Allied pact and later a general European pact. My idea was, above all, to secure peace and quiet, especially for Central Europe."

Beneš's plan was rejected and so was Lloyd George's. Indeed the principal outcome of the Genoa Conference was the sensational treaty of Rapallo between the two

outlaw countries, Germany and Soviet Russia, whose readmission to the honourable circle of European society the Conference had been called to secure. The Conference, in short, was a fiasco for its chief sponsor, Mr. Lloyd George, and as the idea of holding it had been supported in France by Beneš, whose work in promoting the plan had been particularly effective, it is perhaps natural that Lloyd George should have been extremely angry with his old Czech colleague with whom he had previously been on excellent terms. Maybe his indignation was heightened by the fact that Beneš, after opposing (with France) *de jure* recognition of the Soviet Union at this particular moment, started to negotiate a trade treaty with the Soviets, and did this actually at Genoa although the treaty was not signed till some time later, and was never ratified by Czechoslovakia. Beneš quite reasonably justified his action on the ground that *de jure* recognition should be approached gradually via the road of economic intercourse. But Lloyd George thought that Beneš had both gone behind his back and let him down. It is more than doubtful whether he has forgiven him even now. Beneš's feelings towards Lloyd George after Genoa can be fairly clearly gauged from a (for him) unusually tart phrase in that speech of February 1924. "My plan", he said, "met with obstacles mainly because it was based upon a respect for existing international obligations: Lloyd George's proposal also fell through for the reason that it took no account of this last principle."

A couple of years after the abortive Genoa Conference, Beneš seemed to be within a hairbreadth of success in his plan to build an all-Europe Entente on the foundation of

the Entente Cordiale. By this time a Labour Government had come into power in Great Britain, and the conduct of foreign affairs was in the hands of Ramsay MacDonald, who believed firmly in the League of Nations and who created a precedent by being the first British Prime Minister to attend a session of the League Assembly. This was the 1924 Assembly at which the famous Geneva Protocol was elaborated.

In the previous year, the Assembly, largely under Beneš's inspiration, had prepared the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, of which Jonkheer Loudon of the Netherlands said at the subsequent session of the Assembly: "Notwithstanding my sincere admiration for him, I mounted this platform barely a year ago to oppose Dr. Beneš. . . . And why? Because (the Treaty) was devised solely with a view to security while the reduction of armaments was relegated to the background and seemed to be a mere shadow." Because the new Treaty avoided this pitfall, Loudon welcomed it wholeheartedly. So did most of the Geneva delegates.

The drafting of the new scheme was the joint work of Nicholas Politis, the Greek jurist, and Beneš, Politis being responsible for the section dealing with the compulsory settlement of disputes, and Beneš for the sections on security and disarmament. All three aspects of the plan, however, were most carefully and inextricably inter-twined with one another. The signatories were all to be bound to arbitrate all disputes which they had been unable to settle through the ordinary methods of diplomacy; if they went to war in defiance of this undertaking, the other signatories were under an obligation to apply

sanctions against them; and because the enforcement of law was thus made the business of all, each individual signatory was required to reduce his armaments.

If the Labour Government in England had not been forced out of office on an entirely different issue, the Geneva Protocol would in all probability have become the law of Europe if not of the world, although some of the Labour leaders were not particularly happy about it. But in that strange compound of idealism and intrigue which constituted the Geneva atmosphere, the Protocol obtained almost universal approval. Later, more especially in London, it was criticized as ingeniously designed to fasten the Versailles *status quo* on Europe, as detrimental to national interests because it compelled signatories to submit their disputes to third-party judgment, even if the issue in dispute affected those somewhat nebulous matters known as "vital interests", and because it bound States to go to war in areas where these "vital interests" did not appear to be directly concerned.

Beneš sponsored the Protocol in a speech which clearly indicates the kind of international order he was trying to build for Europe. For two years, he said, the League had wrestled with the problem of finding a basis for League and European policy. They had finally established the "principle . . . that the reduction of armaments goes hand in hand with the establishment of some system providing security for countries which have hitherto been obliged to protect their national independence and liberty by armaments. . . . It is a principle . . . which is vital to the political requirements of a number of countries which frankly declare that, unless the reduction of armaments

is accompanied by some kind of guarantee, they cannot reduce their armaments to any appreciable extent. . . .

"Effective guarantees and the promise of assistance", Beneš went on, "are not only a necessary condition but they are also an inevitable consequence of arbitration. Suppose that a treaty of compulsory arbitration has been concluded and then violated: does that not call for sanctions? Is the case not much worse when one country attacks another, having given jointly with other nations solemn promises in writing, than when it is not bound at all and the question at issue is merely some ordinary quarrel or chance dispute affecting national honour? From the point of view of international morality the case is much more serious and sanctions are an absolute necessity."

After admitting that some States might fear that their obligations would be too heavy and others that the guarantees would be insufficient, Beneš declared: "In this matter, I am a practical idealist. I believe that we shall succeed in discovering a means of adjusting the advantages enjoyed by some to the sacrifices made by others. I believe a check can be found for those who are ever ready to make an unwarrantable use of force."

How wrong he was, and yet how right! When his country was first brought to her knees and then ruthlessly subjugated by Hitler, a treaty of compulsory arbitration existed between Germany and Czechoslovakia, just as it had existed between Italy and Abyssinia. But no check was found for those who were "ever ready to make an unwarrantable use of force", although it stood ready to hand in Article 13 of the League Covenant which, if it

had been wholeheartedly applied by all League Members, must inevitably have stopped any war anywhere within a very brief space of time.

In short, Beneš's practical idealism went astray. The Great Powers in whose hands lay the possibility of preventing or circumscribing war thought their obligations might be too heavy. Now they are realizing that by refusing to look beyond their immediate selfish interests they were endangering their own safety and were immeasurably increasing the sacrifices they would later be called upon to make in order to protect themselves from being dismembered. The smaller Powers for which Beneš was the spokesman, turned out to be lamentably right in fearing that the guarantees might be insufficient.

The immediate aftermath, however, of the drafting of the Protocol in October 1924 was most encouraging, above all to Beneš and Politis, the joint authors. Briand, with a dramatic gesture, cried: "I am here on behalf of the French delegation and with the full consent of my Government, to say, in response to the appeal of your [the League's] Committees: 'France adheres to the Protocol. France is prepared to sign it.'" Loudon's testimony we have already heard. It was supplemented by similar sentiments from the Scandinavian countries and from South America. Great Britain and the Dominions were inclined to be slightly hesitant, but this lukewarmness was more than compensated by the declaration of the veteran Count Apponyi, principal delegate of Hungary who had fought Beneš before the League Council on a number of occasions and was to do so again.

"The objection which might be raised from our point

of view", Count Apponyi said, "namely that it (the Protocol) stabilizes an international political state of things which we ourselves have no interest to maintain, cannot be regarded as well founded. The Protocol contains guarantees for the rule of law as against the rule of force. It is true that these guarantees benefit in the first place the established state of things, but they have no exclusive relation to that state of things, but rather to the rule of law as opposed to the principle of force. That a state of things which we dislike will also derive benefit, so long as it exists, from those guarantees is an accident which cannot be altered. The remedy lies in the change of that political situation itself, and the circumstances for such a change will certainly not be worse if abusive power is being checked."

The truth was that at that time, to quote the Survey of International Affairs published under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, "Ex-victors, ex-vanquished and ex-neutrals alike, were almost equally afraid of a future in which war remained a possibility. The ex-victors feared an eventual 'war of revenge' on the part of their recent adversaries, before they themselves had consolidated their position by assimilating the acquisitions which they had just made at their adversaries' expense. The ex-vanquished, unilaterally disarmed as they were, feared that their late conquerors might give them the *coup de grâce* by making a 'preventive war' before they had time to recover. The ex-neutrals feared that in any future war, even if they once again succeeded in maintaining a precarious neutrality as regarded participation in the actual military operations,

they would suffer economically no less severely than the belligerents. Thus most, if not all, the Continental European Governments and peoples foresaw no possible gains, and the gravest possible losses for themselves if loopholes were left open for future 'private wars'."

Hence the almost universal praise showered on Beneš at this eventful session of the League Assembly.

The Protocol was signed on October 2, 1924, after a month's strenuous negotiations in which Beneš and Politis naturally played a leading part. Czechoslovakia ratified it on October 28th, being the first country to do so. But it was soon evident that the Protocol was doomed, the deciding factor being the attitude of the British Conservative Government which succeeded the MacDonald Administration after the famous Zinoviev letter election of October 1924. At a meeting of the League Council in March 1925 Sir Austen Chamberlain gave it its death-blow in spite of Beneš's strenuous efforts in its defence. From that time on Europe harked back to the idea of regional agreements advocated by Sir Austen, who held that the best way to promote peace was "to supplement the Covenant by making special arrangements in order to meet special needs". Beneš admitted that the method of regional agreements is "undoubtedly extremely fruitful", but reaffirmed his conviction that such agreements in order to become "lasting, solid, and giving real security" must be built on "a system analogous to that of the present Protocol". Beneš, however, pleaded in vain. Within a month or two Europe was on the way to the Treaty of Locarno which confined Great Britain's European commitments to the West and,

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though he would not admit it at the time, ended for good Beneš's plan to build a European peace system on the Entente Cordiale. Not until Czechoslovakia had temporarily ceased to exist did Great Britain, urged on by the instinct of self-preservation, seriously think of assuming commitments in the east of Europe. Until the consequences of holding aloof stared her starkly in the face, Great Britain steadfastly refused to listen to Beneš's arguments. Even the more picturesque contentions of the Polish Foreign Minister, Count Skrzynski, failed to move Sir Austen. A Western pact without a guarantee in the East, said Count Skrzynski, as quoted in *Le Temps* of March 20, 1925, is like "having a house which contains beautiful tapestries and taking precautions for them only, abandoning all the objects in the neighbouring rooms to the danger of fire."

The Locarno series of treaties grew out of certain German proposals put forward about six weeks before the Council meeting which killed the Protocol. As soon as the Protocol was unmistakably dead, Beneš told Chamberlain that he "agreed in principle to examine the German proposals and arbitration treaties as a certain advance in the universal work for peace", and a few days later, when speaking to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament, he once again showed that whatever had happened to the Protocol he still had not given up hope of organizing peace on the basis of the Franco-British Entente. The proposed pact, he declared, must eventually lead on "to a guarantee pact which would be universal, or at least European in scope". Germany, he added, must join the

League and the strict letter of the Peace Treaties must be observed.

The prospect of being left in the lurch by the Western Powers made both the Czechs and the Poles anxious to compose their differences. Accordingly, while the preliminaries of the Locarno treaties were being worked slowly out between London, Paris, and Berlin, Beneš and Skrzynski hastily made an onslaught on a series of disputes which Beneš euphemistically described as "technical matters", the solution of which would mean "the definite liquidation of all the disputes which have existed between the two countries and the opening of a new period of friendly relations between the two States." Within a month the solution had been found. It wiped out in an instant, as it were, the animosities of the Teschen and other territorial quarrels, started the two countries on a career of economic collaboration and gave them a comprehensive treaty of conciliation and arbitration. If the reconciliation had been a lasting one, the whole history of Eastern Europe would have been changed. But the incentive behind it was only the temporary alliance of Germany and Russia, both of which were regarded as pariahs by the rest of Europe and therefore not unnaturally decided to consort together. Hitler, soon after he became Chancellor in 1933, decided to drop the alliance concluded at Rapallo years before. Thereafter Poland no longer felt the need of Czechoslovak friendship. So the sore soon festered again, each side blaming the other for having been the first to reintroduce the poison. By the time Hitler had revitalized German militarism, suspicion between these two branches of the Slav race had become a

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tradition, in the establishment of which the personal dislike that existed between Skrzynski's successor, Colonel Beck, and Beneš played no small part. Maybe Beneš should have done more to smooth Poland's ruffled feathers. Maybe the fault was chiefly Beck's. As has already been pointed out, it is a point on which judgment must be reserved until diplomatic archives at present kept secret become public property, and the time for this is not yet.

Meanwhile, however, the negotiations which culminated in the Treaties of Locarno were slowly coming to a head. The Conference opened on October 5, 1925, with a meeting of the delegates of the four Great Powers, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany together with those of Belgium. Two days later, Beneš arrived to represent Czechoslovakia. Skrzynski came on the 8th. On the 11th Beneš met Stresemann, on the 12th Skrzynski also met the German Foreign Minister and on the same day Beneš and Skrzynski, working together, started to negotiate their treaties of arbitration with Germany—treaties which are still in operation but which have never once been brought into play to deal with the questions that have arisen between the respective signatories.

The Geneva Protocol being dead, Beneš's chief efforts at Locarno were devoted to short-circuiting Great Britain's intense distrust of any European commitments. As there was even considerable opposition in Britain to Sir Austen Chamberlain's plan to guarantee in conjunction with Italy the frontiers of France and Belgium, it was clearly out of the question to try to get a British

guarantee for Czechoslovakia. But with France there was no difficulty. Briand was the French delegate at Locarno, and Briand and Beneš, ever since Briand's talk with Masaryk in the early days of the war, had shared pretty much the same views as to the way in which a European peace system should be built. Both were fervent admirers of the defunct Protocol and both wanted to use Locarno as a stepping-stone towards the Protocol ideals of arbitration, security, and disarmament. It was easy for them, therefore, to reach agreement on a Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty of Guarantee which bound France "immediately [to] lend aid and assistance" in case of "an unprovoked recourse to arms" and thus in effect, though not on paper, seemed to make it impossible for Great Britain not to join in the fray too.

Beneš, when he got back to Prague, was very insistent on the merits of that word "immediately". At the conclusion of the Locarno Conference he had, with his usual optimism, wired to Masaryk "that in all the negotiations here our interests and guarantees have been fully defended, that we have succeeded in obtaining in the general agreements important new guarantees for the future and that indisputably great progress has been made for our peace and for the peace of all States here represented." A few days later, addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament, he said: "We must emphasize that (France's) assistance would take effect automatically, as shown by the term 'immediate'. . . . Our former treaty with France thus acquires an entirely new character without losing any of its old effectiveness."

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It was this same Treaty of Guarantee with France which France refused to implement in 1938 when Czechoslovakia was menaced with invasion by Germany. The obligation was just as binding as the one broken by Germany when she invaded Belgium in 1914, but apparently there is less moral obloquy in a deliberate refusal to carry out a pledge than there is in a deliberate breach even though the effects can be equally disastrous.

When the Locarno Treaties had been duly sealed, signed, and delivered in the hall now known as the Locarno Room of the British Foreign Office, Beneš turned with renewed energy to the question of disarmament. Already at the League Assembly in September he had sponsored the adoption of a resolution calling for a conference "as soon as satisfactory conditions have been secured from the point of view of security". Thereafter for several years he was actively engaged in promoting this aim, but always without success. It would be tedious to record either the number of times success seemed only just around the corner or the reasons which prevented agreement at the last moment. Suffice it to say that the negotiations finally broke down when Germany left the Disarmament Conference and the League in October 1933, a few months after the French had refused Hitler's disarmament offer of May 17, 1933. At the time many people thought the French were wrong. But subsequent events have shown that the Nazi mentality does not let little things like treaties stand in the way of what it considers its interests, so that there is at least an element of doubt whether the world would have avoided the rearmament race which began in 1934 even

if there had been a disarmament treaty in the preceding year. The frequent violations of the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact provide eloquent testimony on this point.

Throughout the years after the World War during which Beneš was Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia, he played a leading part in many League of Nations activities beside disarmament. All those who came into contact with him at Geneva agree on one point: that the business of each and every Committee of which he was rapporteur was conducted with exemplary efficiency. The rapporteur, through knowing his brief (which is more than can be said for some of his colleagues), was not only able to get the work of the Committee finished with unusual expedition but was also able to get a "good Press" for its deliberations.

Journalists who have worked at Geneva (the writer among them) can testify to the regrettable fact that the delegate who can explain lucidly the subjects he has been discussing and who can summarize the points of view of other delegations besides his own is a godsend for which to be truly thankful. Beneš's reputation is unassailable in this connection. He also had a complete mastery of the League technique, which consists in finding the highest common factor among a plethora of individual and often conflicting viewpoints. When he succeeded Masaryk as President of Czechoslovakia in 1936 he left a gap at Geneva which was difficult to fill. During the sixteen years since the League had come into existence he had sat as member of the Council for nine years, and he had never missed leading the Czechoslovak delegation for a single session of the Assembly. He had

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been President of the Council on six occasions, and of the Assembly once—in 1935.

But for the scramble for Council seats which went on when Germany was admitted to the League in 1926, the year after Locarno, Beneš would have had an even more imposing list of Council sessions to his credit. But in order to apply balm to the susceptible soul of Poland, which objected to Germany's having a permanent seat on the Council if Poland were denied such a distinction, Beneš gracefully offered to surrender Czechoslovakia's seat. The solution which was ultimately adopted, namely to allocate semi-permanent seats to certain near-Great Powers like Poland and to allow certain established groups of States, such as the Little Entente, to hold one seat which each member of the group occupied in rotation, kept Beneš out of the Council from 1927 to 1932—two years before the Italo-Ethiopian war which started Europe on the road to political chaos from which she has not yet emerged.

The part that Beneš played in facilitating the entry of Germany into the League was followed by a period of friendly relations between Prague and Berlin. Two years afterwards, in 1928, Beneš paid his first visit to the German capital and so successful was it that he reported to the Czechoslovak Parliament on his return that he was "very happy to be able to announce that the conversations had taken place in an atmosphere of the greatest frankness and in the most friendly spirit, with the knowledge that there no longer existed between the two countries any vital contentious issues and that our relations are responding effectively to that spirit of friendliness which

had been established at Locarno as the basis of our future intercourse". Czechoslovakia's relations with Great Britain, France, and Germany, he went on, "have been finally regulated and stabilized with exactitude thanks to our treaties and they run no risk on any point *vis-à-vis* any one of these three Powers".

That was in 1928, the year of the Kellogg Pact which the world guilelessly hailed as the beginning of the end of war. Beneš duly gave the Pact his blessing on the ground that its aims were those of the Geneva Protocol. But he was at pains to point out that unlike the Protocol the Kellogg Pact contained no sanctions against anyone who violated its terms. Its entire weight was moral—its whole conception, he told the Czechoslovak Parliament, "bears eloquent testimony that it has come from a psychology and an environment essentially Anglo-Saxon".

The psychological effect created by the Kellogg Pact was, of course, only temporary, but the immediate sequel was the resumption of negotiations between Germany and France at Geneva when for a moment it looked as though the problems left by the war and the Treaty of Versailles might have been followed by a real peace. Beneš himself hoped that this would be the result. While not concealing from himself the difficulties, he told the Czechoslovak Parliament there was a real prospect that the problem of reparations would be finally solved as well as the problem of the evacuation of the Rhineland. He added that with the solution of these two problems the time would then be ripe for disarmament. But the halcyon days he predicted would follow never arrived. Stresemann died; Briand lost his hold on French foreign

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policy; the Nazi movement began to make rapid headway in Germany. The short-lived period of friendship between Italy and Yugoslavia had already ended and the serious tension which followed over Italy's imperialist designs on the Balkans made it impossible for Beneš to restore the traditional Italo-Czech friendship without risking the greater calamity of splitting the Little Entente. At last, in 1931, the war-clouds again began to emit thunder. Japan in a night took control of Manchuria, flouting the League of Nations whose Assembly was then actually in session, and defying it to put into operation the penal clauses which were obligatory on all members of the League when the territory or independence of one of their fellow-members was violated.

To Beneš, the Manchurian affair seemed portentous far beyond the confines of Asia. "We cannot exaggerate its gravity", he said, and his actions showed that he meant it. Throughout the course of the dispute he did his utmost to rally all the little States to the thesis that treaties must be observed, that the League of Nations' procedure must be upheld and that, above all, the claim to take military action against a neighbour without having first tried arbitration or conciliation as laid down in the Covenant, must be most energetically resisted. "For us Czechoslovaks", he said, "it is a precedent." It cut at the root of the whole conception of international order and of the hope of maintaining peace in Europe. It proved unmistakably, he declared, "the rightness of our foreign policy which is invariably based on the moral force of the methods of peaceful settlement of disputes laid down in the Covenant and which at the same time never

loses sight of the necessity of a policy of alliances . . . to take care of those cases which the Geneva institutions are by themselves unable to resolve".

Holding these views, Beneš naturally played a leading part in the efforts by the League to assert its authority. When the Assembly met in special session on March 3, 1932, he was complimented by the Chinese delegate for his stand for unconditional withdrawal of the Japanese troops from the territory of a fellow-member of the League. Czechoslovakia, Beneš declared, "is concerned in this serious problem solely as a member of the League. She is anxious regarding the results of our present action; she desires the League to fulfil all its obligations, deriving, not only from the Covenant, but from the moral prestige it at present possesses throughout the world. She desires that the League, which in spite of all represents a new spirit and quite a new method in international relations, shall prove that it is useful and indeed indispensable to the maintenance of peace." During the discussions that followed, Beneš sat on the Committee drafting the final resolutions, and was a member of the special Committee of Nineteen which was appointed to supervise the execution of these resolutions. The final failure of the League to safeguard the territorial integrity of one of its members in accordance with Article 10 of the Covenant was for him almost a personal tragedy. More than most of his colleagues he realized where this failure might lead.

It was while the League's failure to succour China in the Manchurian issue was still fresh in everybody's thought that Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on

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January 30, 1933. At that time Beneš was still Rapporteur of the Disarmament Conference, where he had made it his business to try to harmonize the French and German points of view. A number of speeches by the German delegates bear record to his sympathetic attitude towards them. Actually it was Beneš who, early in 1932, had originated a scheme to grant Germany in principle complete and immediate equality of rights in the matter of armaments and gradually to achieve this equality in practice by successive stages spread over a number of years. This plan provided the framework for a whole series of more detailed proposals which fell to the ground one after another until in October 1933, Hitler suddenly took the bit between his teeth and withdrew not only from the Disarmament Conference but from the League itself. Beneš in one of his periodic parliamentary exposés a couple of weeks later said: "In this difficult and complicated situation, our policy . . . will not change in any way the course it has pursued during the past fifteen years. . . . We shall not change in any respect the friendly and correct relations which we have up to now maintained with our neighbour, Germany, whatever may happen there and we hope that the same attitude will be taken on the other side of the frontier."

He added significantly: "We do not at present and never shall interfere with the domestic affairs of any of our neighbours."

In practice, however, there was a profound and almost immediate change in Czechoslovak-German relations. Hitherto Beneš had studiously avoided going into the anti-German camp and he refused to join the anti-

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German *bloc* which the French Foreign Minister, Barthou, tried to engineer during his term of office in 1934. It should also be placed on record that in 1915 during the war Beneš as well as Masaryk had not opposed the idea of union between Germany and Austria, though he changed this view later. Hitler, however, soon forced Beneš into a position of active resistance to German policy. The Führer already had his eye on the Sudetens who in the years before the war had been, like himself, citizens of Austria. He had not forgotten, moreover, that Beneš at the time of the proposed customs union between Germany and Austria, which was ultimately banned by the Permanent Court of International Justice in September 1931, had been firmly opposed to any kind of *Anschluss*, whether political or merely economic. So during 1934 it was steadily brought home to Czechoslovakia that her relations with Germany were going to be different in the future. The vast propaganda machine developed by Goebbels began to get under way. Sensational stories appeared in the German press about Czech promises to the Sudetens during the peace negotiations. Soon Hitler—or Goebbels—evolved the anti-Bolshevik bogey and the myth of the Bolshevik proclivities of the Czechs was sedulously fostered not only in Germany but in Great Britain and France.

The first signs that a dangerous chasm was opening between Czechoslovakia and Germany appeared in June 1935, when Dr. Koch, who had represented Germany as Minister in Prague for fourteen years, was put on the retired list by the Wilhelmstrasse. Dr. Koch was a sincere friend of Czechoslovakia, and the exchange of

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complimentary speeches which marked his retirement was much more than a mere form. It marked, and both Koch and Beneš knew it, the end of an epoch. Up till then, there had been a sincere desire on both sides to smooth out difficulties. From henceforward, on the German side, but certainly not on Beneš's, it was to be a question of creating difficulties, not of removing them, except for the purpose of raising more serious ones.

The speeches of Beneš and Koch are worth rescuing from the diplomatic limbo if only to prove how utterly untrue were the allegations of the Goebbels propaganda machine against Beneš and what Beneš stood for in Czech-German relations. "Permit me, Mr. Minister", said Beneš in his farewell address, "to emphasize the following facts: in the past fourteen years of post-war politics we have frequently had the opportunity of confirming in complete agreement that between our two States there are no direct conflicts or material for such. We have, however, been aware of the important circumstance that the effects of the general European situation have been likely to create considerable difficulties in the path of our friendly relations. But, in each such case I have found that, in complete harmony with my attitude, you have always adopted a course calculated speedily to reduce the difficulties and have found a way whereby a solution, preserving the dignity of both States, could be promptly achieved. You have always laid most emphasis on the things we have in common and which help us to co-operate, rather than upon the things that might tend to separate us. . . .

"In addition", Beneš went on, "how many fruitful

discussions and successful initiatives have there been, how many treaties negotiated and signed, how many adjustments agreed upon, how many economic, financial, social, administrative, and political agreements have been discussed, negotiated and put into operation!"

Beneš concluded by saying that he felt sure Koch would agree with him not only in wishing their collaboration had been even more fruitful but—in spite of the growing number of signs pointing to the contrary—in expressing a conviction that the aim for which they had worked together so devotedly for the whole of those fourteen years would ultimately be achieved.

Koch in his reply began by paying a personal tribute to Beneš—"that critical spirit with which I have so long had the pleasure of collaborating in calm times and turbulent and which belongs to a man whose views are heard, appreciated, and studied in all the countries of the world." Koch went on: "You have called me a man of good will. I accept that. I have always been led by the wish and firm intention to improve the relations between our two States, to effect a *rapprochement* between our two nations and remove the hindrances which part them. But in politics one man of good will can achieve but little. He must have, opposite him, a person dominated by the same feeling and the same desires. If my attempts sometimes had a modest success, I am indebted to you for it, Dr. Beneš, and I thank you for it with all my heart. . . . I shall always think with deep satisfaction of our collaboration, often calm and confident, often, too, somewhat thorny, but always permeated with the sincere wish to achieve understanding and agreement.

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Our tone together was very open and considerably facilitated the success of our discussions. I thank you in this hour of parting that you were so open to me and allowed me to adopt exactly the same attitude towards you."

If the Kochs of Germany had ruled their country's destinies during the years that followed 1935, how different the history of Europe would have been! But Dr. Koch was in many respects an exception to even pre-Hitler Germany's general rule. Unlike the majority of his compatriots he professed to Beneš in his farewell speech "an active interest since my youth in your language, history, customs, and everything concerning your nation and country" and he added that this interest would accompany him in his retirement. In this attitude he was a shining but inconvenient example to those of German race whom the peace treaties had turned into citizens of Czechoslovakia. Most of these despised not only the Czech language but the Czech people, and refused either to learn the one or have anything to do with the other unless circumstances forced them to do so. Hence in part the allegation so often made by English travellers (generally with rather unmerited disapproval) that any Czech who was addressed in German in the street always answered first in his own tongue. Actually there were some Czechs who did and others who did not behave in this way. But the Czechs, as a whole, naturally did not see why they should be forced to speak a foreign language by people who looked down upon Czech as beyond the civilized pale.

The year 1935 when Koch was ominously recalled to Berlin was also the year of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia,

which marked the second stage of the progressive decline in respect for international law which followed the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Throughout the year, Beneš was intent on building up a regional security system to fill the void left by the failure of the Disarmament Conference and to meet the growing danger from Germany. The air was thick with portents of possible disaster. In the previous autumn King Alexander of Yugoslavia and M. Barthou, the French Foreign Minister, had been murdered at Marseilles by a member of a Croat revolutionary organization who had the added distinction of being originally a Macedonian terrorist and of having been given aid and comfort by Hungary. Both in the League and in the conferences of the Little Entente, Beneš played a part in trying to prevent the resultant tension between Yugoslavia and Hungary from developing into war. Before a solution was reached, Germany, disregarding the Treaty of Versailles (not for the first or the last time), re-introduced conscription, and it became obvious that Beneš's efforts to build up a system of alliances against the German danger must be redoubled.

He sponsored or supported all sorts of different combinations, notably the proposal for an Eastern Pact comprising France, Germany, U.S.S.R., Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic States, reinforced by an air pact between Great Britain, France, and Germany which would restrict air armaments as a prelude to an all-round limitation of armaments. Nothing came of it, nor was he more successful in persuading the Little Entente to join with Russia in signing a mutual aid agreement. In the end, much to the annoyance of both Poland and

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Germany, Beneš decided to strengthen the alliance with France and to follow the French example of having a bilateral mutual assistance pact with Russia, but subordinated in the case of Czechoslovakia to the Franco-Russian mutual assistance pact which, as the Czech-Soviet Pact expressly states, had to come into operation before the Czechs could claim Russian help.

It has seemed to many a fateful decision. It wounded the susceptibilities of Poland, whose policy was to build up a strong *cordon sanitaire* between the German National Socialistic imperialism on the one side and the Russian international Communistic imperialism on the other. It gave Goebbels a handle for his propaganda campaign which falsely represented Czechoslovakia as a hotbed of Bolshevism. And in the end the Russian alliance did not save Czechoslovakia.

Yet it is difficult to see what else Beneš could have done. He had no confidence in Beck and he could not have much faith in Poland's ability to stand alone against a rearmed Germany. Furthermore, Poland was traditionally friendly with Hungary and Hungary had no use whatsoever for the Czechs—to say nothing of the fact that a Czech-Hungarian *rapprochement* would have involved splitting the Little Entente whose combined fighting power at the time was superior to Poland's. So, rightly or wrongly, Beneš decided in favour of the same policy as France had inaugurated (and which after the Munich failure even Chamberlain accepted), namely to get closer to Poland's and National Socialist Germany's traditional enemy, Russia. In spite of all the abuse that has been hurled at it, the treaty in which he did so was a very

innocuous affair and Beneš strenuously denies that there were any secret clauses attached to it giving Russia the right to use Czech airports for an attack on Germany as the Goebbels propaganda machine so stridently and continuously alleged. All that the published treaty provided was that if France found that a case of aggression had taken place obliging her to go to Czechoslovakia's aid in accordance with the terms of the Franco-Czech Treaty of 1925, then Russia would follow France's example; but not otherwise. The proviso which made Russian assistance depend on that of France was Beneš's own idea. He had it inserted partly to prove to the Poles that Czechoslovakia was not in Moscow's pocket, partly so as not to alarm Czechoslovakia's two partners in the Little Entente, and partly as a concession to the Anglo-Saxon suspicion of Bolshevism. It was in any case a perfectly safe proviso because it jumped to the eyes that as Russia and Czechoslovakia had no common frontier, Russian help (except by air) could only reach Czechoslovakia if either Poland or Rumania or both were also on the Czech side. At the time the treaty was signed it was a reasonable assumption that any aggression by Germany against Czechoslovakia would result in a united east-European front against Germany coming immediately into being, thanks to France's military alliances with Poland and Rumania.

Beneš was the more convinced of the harmlessness of the Czech-Russian alliance when on January 7, 1935, Laval and Mussolini signed the famous Franco-Italian Protocol by which the two countries buried the hatchet in the Mediterranean and agreed—with the firm approval

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of the Little Entente—to take joint action to uphold the independence of the States of Central Europe, notably Austria. The Strcsa Conference in the following April, although perturbing from Beneš's point of view as representing an attempt on the part of the Great Powers to use the little States as counters, did at least strengthen his feeling that German domination of Central Europe would be resisted by France, Great Britain, and Italy. Beneš believed, though perhaps not quite so confidently as did most people in those days, that vital Italian and German interests in Central and Eastern Europe were in large measure opposed and that in normal circumstances he could probably rely on Italian help to uphold the independence of Czechoslovakia, as had been shown so decisively in July 1934, when Mussolini manned the Brenner at the time of the Nazi *putsch* against the Austrian Chancellor, Dollfuss. But Beneš also knew that where dictators are concerned nothing can be taken for granted. Besides, Mussolini's decisive action in favour of his protégé Dollfuss was taken before the sanctions campaign against Italy during the Abyssinian war had warped the whole outlook of the Fascist régime towards Europe. The shadow of the war against Abyssinia, however, was already on the horizon when the Franco-Italian Agreement was signed, and the war actually broke out in the following September.

Beneš was President of the League Assembly which had to deal with the question of applying sanctions against Italy. It was a position of peculiar delicacy, for certain knotty points of procedure which involved the whole question whether League sanctions could or could

not be applied had to be decided under the President's authority.

Although all decisions whether on question of principle or of procedure were always taken collectively by the whole Bureau of the Assembly consisting of five Presidents of Committees and six Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, it seems that the Italian Government found great difficulty in forgiving Beneš for the part he was called upon to play during this crucial time. Yet the Italian Government, if it had not been so anxious to win a new colonial empire, could not but have realized that, throughout the Assembly session, Beneš as President did his utmost to avert the catastrophe of war and to settle the dispute through the League's conciliation procedure.

The Assembly resolution calling upon League members to co-ordinate "the measures which they may severally contemplate", was challenged by Baron Aloisi, the Italian delegate, on the ground that "no decision" had "as yet been taken by any competent organ of the League of Nations to the effect that a case covered by Article 16 had arisen". He claimed, therefore, that it was not in order for the Assembly to establish any Committee to apply Article 16. Beneš, in accordance with the Covenant and the opinion of the Bureau of the Assembly, replied: "No organ of the League has power to decide, in such a way as to bind all the members, that one of them has violated the Covenant." That decision, he intimated, was one which individual sovereign States must take on their own individual responsibility. Consequently, he ruled that the resolution on which a vote had to be taken did not constitute a formal resolution of the

Assembly and that therefore the question of a majority or unanimous vote did not arise. Thus Beneš short-circuited in advance the efforts which Hungary and Austria at Italy's instigation were planning with the intention of killing the proposed resolution. Had Beneš taken the view Aloisi wanted him to take, the provisions of Article 5 of the Covenant would have operated and Article 5 says unmistakably that "except where otherwise expressly provided in the Covenant . . . decisions at any meeting of the Assembly or of the Council shall require the agreement of all the members of the League represented at the meeting".

The consensus of legal opinion appears to be that Beneš's interpretation of the Covenant is correct. One may legitimately ask oneself, however, whether the Bureau of the Assembly should not have invited a special committee of jurists to confirm its decision. It can be stated definitely that if the Italian delegation had asked for the appointment of such a committee, Beneš would have been among the first to support the proposal, even though no one could ever accuse him of being one of those statesmen who lack the courage of their convictions. And at the time there seemed to be no special call for prudence. Sir Samuel Hoare had just made his famous speech at Geneva nailing the British colours unequivocally to the League mast. It appeared, indeed, inconceivable that there could be any other end to the sanctions episode than the gradual wearing away of Italy's powers of resistance.

Beneš himself was enthusiastic about Hoare's speech. He regarded it as bringing his long-cherished dream of

collective security and an international order down to the realm of accomplishable fact. He felt that at last England was pledged to "an effort to make of the League of Nations an effective political factor for the preservation of peace in Europe and the world by organizing a genuine and effectual collective security such as has for many years been demanded by the French, ourselves, and many other European States." It was because of Hoare's speech, he said, "that the League at once demonstrated so much decision and effectiveness in its action. Everyone thought that if England should go forward consistently in the Italo-Abyssinian conflict in applying the Covenant, that if she proceeded to sanctions, it would be an international event of the first order. . . . Furthermore, leaving the Abyssinian conflict aside, it would be the first case of the application of sanctions, a first great precedent which could have far-reaching significance." In short, it would wipe out the dangerous memory of the League's failure over Manchuria and establish a real barrier to the growing menace of Hitlerian militarism.

Anxious though he was to prevent the sanctions dispute from developing into a European war, Beneš stood strongly for sanctions as he had done on all previous cases on the ground that it was the duty of every member of the League of Nations to carry out to the full its obligations under Article 16 of the Covenant. But even while the crucial question of an oil sanction was still under consideration, the world just before Christmas 1935 was suddenly confronted with the Hoare-Laval plan to give Italy half Abyssinia. Beneš had supported the idea

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of Franco-British mediation outside the League; but he did not participate in the negotiations about the Hoare-Laval peace proposals. He realized that though it was so important to avoid plunging Europe into war over the Ethiopian issue, yet it was equally if not more necessary not to repeat the Manchurian failure and thus establish a new precedent against the rule of law in international relations. As things turned out, not only did the dispute between Italy and the League provide Germany with an opportunity to discard legal methods in promoting her aims, but it also established a firm conviction that France and Great Britain were not prepared to go to war. It gave, in fact, the signal to both Germany and Italy that they could pursue a path of illegality with impunity. In March 1936 Hitler denounced the Treaty of Locarno (but not the Czech-German Treaty of Arbitration which was signed at the same time) and remilitarized the Rhineland. In the summer of the same year—July 8, 1936—the Spanish insurrection broke out with the prior connivance of at least one of the two totalitarian States—Italy—and the active help of both of them from the early days of the fighting.

It was while these grave tensions were developing in Europe that Beneš relinquished the post of Foreign Minister to take up the mantle of Masaryk. Beneš's election as President was in December 1935. Up to that time he and Masaryk had held their respective offices continuously since the Republic had come into being seventeen years before. And both realized that the real testing time was about to come. Both believed that the crisis would pass without another major war.

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As President, Beneš had quite a different task to perform from the one which had occupied him for so long. At one jump he left the tangle of international relations for the intricate web of internal consolidation. Control of the minutiae of foreign affairs passed out of his hands and the reins of the internal racial question came into them. In reality, however, the international and external problems of Czechoslovakia were merely different facets of the same question. Neither aspect could be isolated from the other. Consequently it was natural that Beneš should remain in close contact with his successor at the Foreign Office and that his advice should be asked and generally followed on all major issues.

It was already clear that the whole face of European policy was changing. Mussolini, who had massed troops on the Brenner when Hitler seemed about to invade Austria in July 1934, at the time of the murder of the Austrian Chancellor, Dollfuss, was now making common cause with his fellow-dictator. And to make matters worse, they had discovered a really effective signature tune—their hymn of hate against Bolshevism—which roused a responsive chord in the minds of many English Conservatives and which caused the wise-heads of the French Right to rub their heads much more over the threat to the structure of French society from the Front Populaire than over the strategic consequences to the French nation of an Italo-German domination of Spain.

Beneš himself repudiated entirely the danger of Europe's becoming "either fascisized or bolshevized". He refused to believe (so he told the nation in his

presidential Christmas message for 1936) "either in an ideological war or in rumours of a Russo-German or Russo-Japanese war". And he added: "Nor did we believe the reports of an attack on Austria, upon Lithuania, or upon Czechoslovakia." On the contrary, he still thought an agreement with Germany possible "while preserving our existing ties (with France, the Little Entente, the League, and Russia) and not deviating from the policy we have pursued hitherto. . . . In that spirit we shall do all we can to avoid war in 1937. I believe that we shall avoid it."

Though Beneš was right so far as Europe was concerned, 1937 was certainly a year of steadily increasing strain in international relations. China and Japan became locked in a titanic struggle, intervention by Germany and Italy in the Spanish civil war grew more and more open, and the campaign in Germany against the Jews, against "international Bolshevism", and against Czechoslovakia increased steadily in violence. Beneš still declared firmly that no attack on the integrity or independence of his country was contemplated and he went steadily along with his new task of finding a solution of the minority problem. During the summer he made an official presidential tour for the purpose of getting into direct touch with the various component parts of the Republic and in the course of it he visited the Sudeten regions of northern Bohemia when he was given a rousing reception. At Reichenberg (Liberic) on August 19, 1936, he made an important speech in which he outlined his conception of the respective rôles of Czechoslovaks and Germans in the life of the Republic.

As this speech contains the essence of Beneš's political creed and shows the gulf that separated his philosophy from the Hitlerian concept of a Europe which existed solely to provide living space (*Lebensraum*) for Germans, it is desirable to quote from it at some length. After declaring his conviction that the two races were "too mature to allow themselves to be denationalized", Beneš made a strong appeal for collaboration in the political and economic spheres and called for a surcease of the all too common tendency to exaggerate racial differences. "The question of our national policy and also of our Germans", he went on, "has recently become a topic of interest both inside and outside our country. Let us say at the outset that the reasons for this are to be sought in the chaotic conditions prevailing in the international sphere, in the high tension that pervades national sentiment in Germany, and in a certain radicalization of the racial minorities not merely with us but in all countries. . . .

"According to universally recognized international law, nationality questions are an internal concern for all countries without exception. Czechoslovakia adheres to this principle unconditionally and will continue to do so without deviating one inch. No European State has any right to intermeddle in these questions and Czechoslovakia, as a sovereign State fully conscious of its dignity and rights, will in no circumstances suffer such intervention. The sole external influence which our State allows in these matters is the supervision exercised by the League of Nations. Our State will in every case respect that. . . . We permit of no other pressure, no other

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intervention in either the juridical or political sphere and so cannot discuss our nationality questions with anybody else."

Beneš maintained this attitude until, under the pressure of Great Britain and France, he accepted the Runciman mission in the summer of 1938.

On the internal aspects of the Sudeten problem, Beneš expressed the view that any legal basis which was laid down "represents merely a certain juridical minimum" and that the relationships of the two races should "depend exclusively on mutual agreement and co-operation, upon direct, open and loyal discussions without pressure, without threats, without nervousness and radicalism, without harsh words and exaggerations and without any tendentious or untrue presentation of the facts". He pleaded that "this work can only be successful if you follow in the footsteps of those classic figures⁷ of the German spirit which are great and classical for the Czechs too—in the footsteps of Herder, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller and their like—if we all do what we can to come closer together in our ideal concept of the world and if neither the one nor the other of us allows himself to be bewildered by the chaos of ideas of post-war Europe, by temporary ideologies which separate peoples instead of drawing them together, and which ere long will be ousted by the genuine ideals of humanity and a sensible Europeanism."

Rejecting Fascist, totalitarian, and Communist principles as providing no solution for their joint problem, Beneš told his Sudeten audience that the Czechoslovak Constitution "provides a common meeting-ground for us

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all. Our Constitution is of so liberal a character that it suffices to meet all these problems. Our political philosophy and morality take the form of democracy, a democracy that provides us with a solution of all our problems since it postulates in all political negotiations a respect for the human personality and assures complete civil equality, irrespective of differences of class, nationality or religion."

Beneš then enumerated some of the achievements of the Czechoslovak Republic in the seventeen years of its existence. He admitted frankly that there had been "shortcomings and a debit side", but claimed that these were outweighed by the assets. Czechoslovakia was one of the few States, he said, which had remained untouched by convulsions, revolutions, and *putsches*. In the years 1920-22 it had waged a triumphant war against Communism and in 1925-29 against Fascism. Throughout this whole period it had remained truly democratic; class distinctions between worker, peasant, tradesman, manufacturer, the intelligentsia, and middle classes were far less than in other countries; Right parties and Left co-operated in the government. Theirs was, in fact, "a country of the happy mean".

Finally he spoke once again about the possibility of war. "I do not deny for all time the possibility of conflicts", he said, "but in the first place they are neither inevitable nor necessary, nor present nor near; and secondly both we *and our friends* are prepared so to defend the State to the last breath that such a conflict would hardly bring any benefit to an aggressor. For that reason conflicts can be avoided. I am to-day convinced

that the Locarno Powers will come to some agreement this autumn about collaboration in Europe and that good neighbourly relations on a treaty basis will be achieved between Germany and ourselves."

It is outside the scope of this book to go into a detailed analysis of this speech. To do so would involve a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the whole Czecho-Sudeten issue which, in spite of German efforts to fasten the entire blame on Beneš's shoulders, was not really Beneš's responsibility at all but the Czech Government's. Even so, nobody can really deny that, Switzerland apart, none of the Central and East European States had such a good minority record as Czechoslovakia. Shortcomings existed, of course. But this was inevitable in a new State in which there had been insufficient time to eliminate the friction inseparable from new and untried institutions. Twenty years in the sight and life of a nation are but as the "yesterday" of the psalmist. It has taken the Swiss, and ourselves too, for that matter, a good many more years than twenty to adjust our minority relationships. Some of our own have not been adjusted yet, after several centuries. So far as Czechoslovakia is concerned, it would be asking too much of human nature to expect all the animosities arising from past racial relationships in Austria-Hungary to disappear on the instant that the oppressive hand of the Habsburg régime was removed. There was, no doubt, bad will, as well as good, on the side of the Czechs toward the minorities; but the minorities quite certainly manifested considerably more bad will, and in the end bad faith too, toward the Czechs than the Czech ever did toward the minorities.

Beneš himself played an important but in the main secondary part in drafting the main lines of that policy (which was not always carried out exactly in accordance with his conceptions of justice), but to identify him personally with a (largely fictitious) policy of repression of the Sudetens as the German propaganda machine has attempted to do is not merely unjust but contemptible. Beneš became President in December 1935. Until that time, except for one period of a few months in 1921-22, when he was Prime Minister as well as Foreign Minister, Beneš was wholly and solely concerned with international affairs, not internal ones. And there were times during his career as a Minister of State when he was most violently attacked by Czech nationalists, just as Masaryk was, on the ground that he was too moderate and inclined to be too lenient to the Germans in the Republic.

Leaving the controversial aspects of the Reichenberg speech on one side, the abiding impression Beneš's words leave is one of deep pathos when we bear in mind what happened to his country and his ideals within the short space of one year afterwards. The speech was an appeal to reason and moderation, and when passions are aroused reason and moderation alike go to the wall—too often in company with those who preach and practise them. To the German Nazis, of course, every word Beneš uttered was sheer hypocrisy. Having drunk incontinently of the orthodox milk of their leader's *Mein Kampf*, they loathed and despised democracy everywhere and when that word "democracy" had the prefix "Czech", the mere mention of it became insupportable. The Nazi ideal against which Beneš fought was the deification of the

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State and of the personality of its leader which accounted the individual as nothing—as less even than that, if the individual had the temerity to be non-German. And it taught further, not as Beneš did, that majority and minority had the duty to give as well as take, but that the rights of a German community, however small, superseded the rights of the non-German community, however large, in whose midst—or even near which—it happened to be living.

But when Beneš spoke at Reichenberg, the moment for action by Germany had not yet arrived. The Nazi propaganda machine had not yet had time to inflame its own supporters to the required degree of frenzy. Austria, too, was still independent and Czechoslovakia's turn could only come after Austria had been absorbed. But Hitler's day of reckoning for Dr. Schuschnigg was already approaching fast though only Hitler himself knew it. The fate of Austria and of Schuschnigg sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia and of Beneš. Beneš was more fortunate than the Austrian Chancellor for, though forced to resign and flee his country after a bitter struggle lasting from first to last no less than three years—from the departure of Koch to the "Settlement" at Munich—he did at least escape incarceration for the "crime" of sticking to an agreement which Hitler had determined to break. It took the joint pressure of the four greatest Powers in Europe to break Beneš politically, and to smash up the State he had helped to liberate. Actually, the fuller appreciation of the circumstances of his defeat which has now come to his countrymen and to the world outside has served to restore both his authority as a

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statesman and his reputation as a political thinker. Only one year and six months after Reichenberg, the Manchurian precedent which Beneš had declared in 1931 would "cut at the root of the whole conception of international order and the hope of maintaining peace in Europe" had fulfilled its evil promise in every detail except one: it had wrought its destruction without war. And war itself was to follow only eleven months later.

Surgical Operations

AND NOW we have come to 1938—the year in which the young Czechoslovak State which Beneš had nursed so lovingly and so long, said good-bye to its teens and to a great deal else besides. It was a year of continuous crisis: first, the Austrian *Anschluss*, then the demand of the Sudetens for autonomy within the existing boundaries of Czechoslovakia, followed in quick succession by reports of German mobilization against Czechoslovakia in May, the frenzied fortification of the German Siegfried Line along the French frontier in the summer, the Runciman Mission to Prague in August when the British Government rashly undertook to mediate in what was theoretically still no more than an internal dispute between two elements in the Czech body politic. And throughout the whole period from April onwards when Henlein and the other Sudeten leaders drafted their famous Karlsbad demands was the growing stridency of their master's voice in Berlin, which increased in volume and gall until it culminated in the self-determination cry at Nuremberg on September 12th—the opening shot in one of the most astonishing episodes in history.

What part did Beneš play in these world-stirring events? Is he the man who must ultimately be held responsible for laying Czechoslovakia on the dissecting-table to undergo an operation which in the end proved

fatal? Could the amputations which were carried out at and after Munich and which left her stricken and helpless in Germany's hands have been avoided?

Diplomatic archives being sacrosanct until many years after the events with which they deal, it is very difficult to give a complete answer to such questions to-day. Enough evidence is already available, however, to exonerate him completely on certain charges which have been brought against his policy. As to the others, there are obvious reasons why Beneš himself cannot yet tell all he knows. There are equally obvious reasons why Hitler is unlikely to speak out on two vital matters: firstly, whether he would have insisted on the dismemberment of his victim if the British Government, instead of hedging, had said outright and from the outset that it would fight; and secondly, whether he was after all bluffing at Munich and would have eventually climbed down if France and Great Britain had not saved him from this ignominy by actually presenting him with more than he had asked for.

It may be many years before we fully understand the whole significance of Munich. Even so far as Beneš himself is concerned we cannot yet be certain whether the collapse of his policy and the dismemberment of the State he did so much to form mean that his career as a statesman is ended or whether his eclipse is only a temporary one. There can be little doubt, however, that from the outset he expected the pendulum to swing back again, though not till after another war. Had he felt otherwise he would doubtless have decided to stay permanently in the United States instead of merely going

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there for six months to lecture prior to coming to live in England, so that he could be within hailing distance if the call to return to his own country should come.

One reason for the faith that is in him was his conviction that the present rulers of Germany looked upon Munich merely as a stepping-stone to complete domination of the European continent if not of the world. Long before Munich, he believed—and he has already been justified by events—that although Hitler's policy, as outlined by himself in *Mein Kampf*, warns Germany against trying to build up a colonial empire overseas in opposition to England, the very fact that Hitlerist Germany seeks to dominate Europe would inevitably put the two countries into opposite camps, because from the idea of European domination to the quest for world empire is only a step, and a short step at that.

Ever since Beneš first went to Berlin in 1908 and saw something of the Kaiser's vast military preparations, he has been convinced that what he has called in language almost identical with Hitler's (in *Mein Kampf*), "the non-political and herdlike character of the German people", made them an easy prey to the machinations of ambitious men. Beneš knew quite well that the end of the World War did not mean the end of German militarism—that some day or other, in fact, Europe would have to face the 1914-18 danger over again. His foreign policy was built around this realization. It aimed at persuading all those States which stand to suffer from German aggression to band together for mutual self-protection. It was, in short, the policy of collective security.

At the outset, and on paper, his policy achieved, as

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we have seen, considerable success. It was based on Articles 10 and 16 of the League Covenant which would have given all the League members all the security they needed—if the terms had been carried out. But already in 1923, when Mussolini bombarded the Greek island of Corfu and virtually got an indemnity from Greece for doing so, it was evident that the League Covenant could not be relied on to keep out the rain. Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, China, drove home the lesson of Corfu. Consequently Beneš tried to reinforce the Covenant by means of separate pacts of mutual assistance with individual States. Here—again, as we have seen—he achieved a substantial success on paper. In so far as Hungary was concerned, the success was more than a paper one, for the Little Entente really did operate—until the danger from Hungary was overshadowed by the much greater danger from Germany. Against Germany, Beneš failed to induce either Yugoslavia or Rumania to give any specific guarantee even on paper. Neither State would go further than its general obligations under the League Covenant, though, to do Beneš justice, he never asked them to undertake any specific addition to their commitments except as part of a wider collective security system by which all three of the Little Entente States would have signed a mutual assistance pact together with France. But in spite of this failure, he was able to persuade both France and the Soviet Union to pledge their help to Czechoslovakia. Since Great Britain was similarly pledged to help France, the refusal of the Little Entente States to do likewise did not seem to be too serious. Nor, for the same reasons, did the constant

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enmity of Poland. To one who, like Beneš, believes in keeping a promise, it was difficult to foresee that when the testing time came neither these pledges nor even Mr. Chamberlain's ubiquitous and well-meaning umbrella were any better insurance against bad weather than the League Covenant had been.

It is easy with after-the-event wisdom to say that Beneš being a realist and a diplomat should not have put his trust in documents and that he ought to have known that people of distant lands could not really be expected to lay down their lives for Czechoslovakia, treaty or no treaty. But he himself felt and still feels one hundred per cent certain that the whole future liberty of those distant peoples as well as of his own countrymen was at stake during the crisis that culminated in the Munich surrender. Beneš believes passionately in freedom and in democracy. He felt that fate had placed Czechoslovakia in the firing line to uphold those ideals. He regarded it as a post of honour. He was ready to fight and he credited his French associates with sentiments similar to his own, especially as they never tired of telling him that they stood solidly with him. England, he felt sure, would have to fight if France did. Convinced as he was that the ultimate effect of not fighting would be even more disastrous than the immediate effect of a surrender, he perhaps failed to read the signs of the times and held his ground longer than a mere politician, careful only for his office, would have done. As an idealist, however, he had no option but to hold on. He was faced with the bitter dilemma of either betraying all his ideals and his friends by following the example of others and making

terms with Hitler and Nazidom, or of sticking unflinchingly to his policy of trying to persuade Europe that the abandonment of Czechoslovakia meant the utter breakdown of all sound principles of international intercourse, to say nothing of the probable destruction not only of Czechoslovakia itself but of other States besides.

In the end the final debacle at Munich came so suddenly that there was no way out left for him. The same two friendly States which had given him at Versailles wider frontiers than he actually wanted, turned round on him and ordered him, on pain of handing his country over to a brutal enemy, to surrender not merely the areas he had wished not to take, but much more besides—so much more, in fact, that no reasonable man could ever have expected Czechoslovakia to survive as an independent State within its new frontiers. Moreover, it must be added that in the nineteen years between Versailles and Munich, France and Great Britain had encouraged Beneš to regard the Versailles frontiers as definitive. The whole economic and defensive structure of the State had been built on that basis. In short, the only thing that is to the credit of the two countries concerned in this sorry business is that they presented the Munich pistol at Beneš's head "in the cause of peace", not of justice. Even so, they were grievously mistaken.

Some people think that Beneš, when his Western friends deserted him, should have bidden his countrymen to fight Germany alone, as they were undoubtedly prepared to do. Many hold that if he had done so the democracies would soon have changed their minds and come to his country's help after all. Beneš himself never

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took this view, partly because, with France and Britain standing aside, Czechoslovakia would have had to face invasion by Poland as well as by Germany. But the decisive fact undoubtedly was that he had had the most definite warnings from the British as well as the French Governments that if the Czechs decided to fight alone they would be left to their fate. When the British Minister in Prague urged the Czech Government to withdraw its first qualified refusal to accept the Anglo-French plan of September 19th for ceding the Sudetenlands to Germany, he begged Beneš "to consider urgently and seriously before producing a situation for which we (the British, could take no responsibility". The French Minister similarly urged that if war resulted from Czechoslovakia's attitude, "la France ne s'y associera pas". Though both Governments might, and probably would, have fallen if they had stuck to this line of policy in spite of a German attack on Czechoslovakia, Beneš was convinced that their decision was final and that in no case would they help Czechoslovakia after having sent to her the fatal Anglo-French proposals of September 19, 1938. He therefore did not feel justified in gambling hundreds of thousands of Czech lives and the whole existence of his nation on such a possibility, all the more so as he regarded the Munich affair simply as an incident in the history of Anglo-German rivalry and felt sure that there would be a sequel before long. Rather than risk another White Mountain, he therefore counselled bowing temporarily to the storm, being confident that the gale would moderate again in due course. He refused to be dismayed even by the fact that the surgical operation

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of Munich made Czechoslovakia a vassal state of Germany and thus paved the way for the whole Czech nation to be made second-class citizens of "Great Germany" in spite of the claim that Germany was ostensibly asking at Munich for nothing but the right of self-determination for Germans.

Throughout the crisis of 1938, Hitler harped on the self-determination string. In his speech to the Reichstag on February 20, 1938, when he let fly at Dr. Schuschnigg just before he annexed Austria, he said: "Over 10,000,000 Germans live in two of the States adjoining our frontiers", adding ominously that "the Germany of to-day" would take care of "these fellow-Germans who live beyond our frontiers and are unable to ensure for themselves the right to their general freedom, personal, political and ideological".

The Führer has since admitted—in a speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939—that he had already made up his mind to annex Austria at least a month before he spoke to the Reichstag in February 1938. It was "in January 1938", he declared, that "I made the final resolve" to gain in the course of the year "the right of self-determination for the 6,500,000 Germans in Austria". Yet when he was interviewed at Linz, Austria, by Ward Price, the *Daily Mail* correspondent, on March 13, 1938, he said that he had occupied Austria because "Herr Schuschnigg tried to spring this plebiscite on his country".

At first, Hitler went on, "I could not believe the news. I sent an emissary to find out if it could possibly be true. He reported that it was, so I determined to act." Strange

words if his subsequent statement is correct—and who can doubt it?—that he had made his “final resolve” in January, for Schuschnigg did not announce his plebiscite till early in March.

In that same speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, Hitler repeated the admission he made at Nuremberg on September 12, 1938, to the effect that he had decided on “a radical solution” of the Sudeten dispute with Czechoslovakia immediately after certain events of May 21, 1938, when Beneš informed the French and British Ministers in Prague that he had reason to believe Germany was mobilizing against Czechoslovakia. Hitler has always denied this, but according to Mr. Seton Watson,¹ Goebbels stated in a speech on November 19, 1938, that Hitler had fixed May 28th as the date for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. I have not personally seen this statement in any reports of Goebbels’s speech that have come to my notice. In view of the known facts, however, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Hitler’s Reichstag speech on February 20, 1938, was the first shot in a carefully thought out, and as carefully concealed, campaign to foment a crisis which should be first confined to Austria and then extended to Czechoslovakia as soon as a convenient opportunity had been created.

Though at the time nobody but Hitler himself had the slightest inkling of his intentions, even towards Austria, and certainly not towards Czechoslovakia, his February speech aroused considerable misgivings. Beneš replied to it in a statement to British journalists on March 5th.

¹ In his book *Munich and the Dictators*.

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He acknowledged frankly that the one great internal problem for Czechoslovakia was the problem of the minorities, particularly of the German minority. As to this, he went on, "our treatment of the minorities and the relationship between the Government and the German parties here constitute an internal issue which can never be the subject of direct official negotiations or discussion with a foreign Power." At the same time, the Czechoslovak Government would "always remain faithful to the Minority Treaties and holds itself responsible to the League for their fulfilment. It also admits the moral right of Europe to take an interest in the minorities, because public opinion in all countries has the right to watch over everything of importance to the peace of Europe. . . . We are prepared to place at the disposal of our friends any information they may desire concerning the minorities . . . and, moreover, if a general settlement can be reached between the Great Powers of Europe to which all concerned must contribute, then Czechoslovakia is prepared, as always, to make her contribution too."

Six days after Beneš's statement, German troops marched into Austria. Two days later, two-thirds of the 10,000,000 "fellow-Germans" of whom Hitler had spoken were already citizens of Greater Germany.

The annexation of Austria was accompanied by most reassuring words to Czechoslovakia, the country in which the remaining one-third of Hitler's "fellow-Germans" lived. While Hitler himself lay low and said nothing, he authorized Goering to tell the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin that it would be the German Government's

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earnest endeavour to improve Czechoslovak-German relations. Goering also pointed out that the Czech-German Treaty of Arbitration signed at Locarno in 1925 was still in force and added that, in order to calm any Czechoslovak fears that might still exist, German troops marching into Austria had received strictest orders to keep at least 15 kilometres from the Czechoslovak frontier. The French Government also published a categorical promise that France would honour her bond to come to Czechoslovakia's help if she were attacked. The following day, March 15th, the Soviet Government gave a similar assurance, subject to the contractual condition, namely that France should have already implemented its promise to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance. Nine days later, in a Foreign Affairs debate in the House of Commons, Neville Chamberlain, while refusing to give any prior pledge to help Czechoslovakia, reminded the House of Anthony Eden's statement as Foreign Secretary that British "armaments may be used in bringing help to a victim of aggression in any case where in our judgment it would be proper under the provisions of the Covenant to do so". Mr. Chamberlain added on his own account: "Where peace and war are concerned, legal obligations are not alone involved and if war broke out it would be unlikely to be confined to those who have assumed such obligations. . . . It would be well within the bounds of probability that other countries, besides those which were parties to the original dispute, would almost immediately become involved. This is especially true in the case of two countries—Great Britain and France."

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Here in general outline is the position the various protagonists maintained throughout the first half of the year of Munich. Beneš is insisting that the Sudeten problem is an internal one in which, however, other countries may legitimately take an interest because it affects the peace of Europe; he is ready to contribute to a "general settlement" but stands firmly against a bilateral arrangement with Germany. Hitler is demanding as of right to look after the welfare of fellow-Germans inside Czechoslovakia and wants to improve Czech-German relations—in other words, a bilateral settlement instead of a general one. France and Soviet Russia are protesting their fidelity to their engagements. The British Government, while evidencing reluctance to be drawn in, admits that "it would be well within the bounds of probability" that Great Britain would be involved if war between Czechoslovakia and Germany ever started. On the whole, therefore, Beneš had reason to be satisfied with his position. He had two firm promises of support from two powerful friends and a strong probability that if a war started, Great Britain would soon come to his help also.

After Chamberlain's statement to the House of Commons on March 24th, it was evidently Hitler's move, and he made it on April 23rd through Henlein, his proxy as leader of the Sudeten Germans. The annexation of Austria had naturally made a tremendous impression on the Sudetens and they immediately called a conference at Karlsbad to draft far-reaching demands for autonomy within the frontiers of Czechoslovakia. "In order to pave the way for peaceful development", declared Henlein in

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enumerating the Eight Points of the so-called Karlsbad Plan, there must be—

- (1) Full equality of status for Czechs and Germans.
- (2) A guarantee of this status through the recognition of the Sudeten Germans (meaning only his own political party) as a legal personality.
- (3) Delimitation and legal recognition of the German areas in the Czechoslovak State.
- (4) Full self-government for these areas.
- (5) Legal protection for every citizen living outside his own "national" area.
- (6) Removal of, and reparation for, all "injustices" inflicted since 1918.
- (7) Recognition of the principle: "only German officials within German areas".
- (8) Full liberty for Germans to profess German nationality and German political philosophy.

While some of these demands were unexceptionable, others, especially the last, could clearly not be accepted without upsetting the whole democratic basis of the Constitution which Masaryk and Beneš had worked so hard to bring into being. "German political philosophy" meant National Socialism which stands among other things for racial intolerance and the extermination of all rival political theories. Beneš and the Czech Government had obligations under both counts. There were the smaller German political groups, some of which had been co-operating with the Czechs for many years, and there were the Jews. From the moment these demands were made, therefore, it was certain that no agreement was

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possible unless either Czech democracy or Sudeten National Socialism capitulated on fundamental issues. If further proof were needed beyond the Eight Points themselves, it was given in Henlein's speech when he put the Points forward. "We solemnly and openly declare", he said, "that our policy is inspired by the principles and ideas of National Socialism. If Czech statesmen want to reach a permanent understanding with us Germans *and with the German Reich* (my italics) they will have to fulfil our demands for a complete revision of Czech foreign policy, which up to to-day has led the State into the ranks of the enemies of the German people."

It was notice to quit, so far as Beneš was concerned, because he could not surrender the faith of a lifetime. He could not allow National Socialism to supplant democracy in the Czechoslovak Constitution. And though he wanted agreement with Germany, he had a too lively sense of the variable nature of German sincerity to come to a private arrangement with his big neighbour when this meant leaving the ranks of Germany's alleged enemies, France and the U.S.S.R. It was imperative that any settlement with Germany should be guaranteed by those "enemies" and by Britain if he was not to suffer the fate of Austria and of Schuschnigg, who signed a separate agreement with Hitler in 1936 only to have it repudiated in 1938. Hitler tried to wean the Czechoslovak Government from this standpoint on many occasions, particularly in 1936-37. Beneš's influence was always against accepting. In this he differed diametrically from the Polish Foreign Minister, Joseph Beck, who, having tested his French allies and found them wanting, decided to

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make the best terms he could with the traditional enemy of his country. Beck lost his faith in France's determination to prevent Germany again dominating Europe even before the moment came when Hitler broke the Treaty of Versailles and marched into the Rhineland in 1936. There is good reason to believe that in 1933 Beck, on behalf of the Polish Government, offered to support France in preventive military action against Germany, and that after the occupation of the Rhineland he repeated the offer in order to drive Hitler out again. France refused. Beck argued, not unnaturally, that if the French would not march in face of a German move incontestably directed against themselves, they certainly would not march to keep Hitler out of either the Polish Corridor or the Sudetenlands.

Beneš, however, was ready to keep his word and he believed his allies would keep theirs. He frequently inquired whether they would do so and received the most categorical assurances. So though in the first half of 1938 the conduct of foreign affairs was no longer in his hands, his advice was always against a private deal with Hitler. If the Czechoslovak Government had overruled him, he would in all probability have resigned the Presidency. But the Czechoslovak Government agreed with Beneš that for Czechoslovakia it was impossible to cut herself adrift from the other Great Powers of Europe. Poland was big enough to be treated with a certain respect. But in the case of Czechoslovakia, a bilateral deal with Hitlerist Germany could, in his opinion, only have worked out one way. Sooner or later—and, as he correctly surmised, probably sooner—Czechoslovakia

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would have been reduced to vassalage. So Beneš stuck to his guns, knowing, by the way, that Skoda guns are pretty good guns—the best, maybe, in the world. He fully believed, however, that if the democracies stood firmly together, the guns would not have to be brought into action.

April passed and May came, and with May the Czechoslovak municipal elections. Clashes became more and more frequent between Sudetens and Czechs and between Sudeten Party members and the minority of other Germans who were opposed to them. Troop movements began to be rumoured inside Germany.

There always has been, and still is, much mystery about those alleged troop movements. Hitler has declared they never took place. Beneš is quite certain they did. There is ground, too, for asserting that the military authorities both in France and Great Britain also knew that they did. What is incontestable is that Hitler dated his resolve to settle the Sudeten question once for all on his own terms from the events of mid-May. The first hint of this came in his speech to the Nazi rally at Nuremberg on September 21st when he said: "Dr. Beneš and the Government invented the lie that Germany had mobilized troops and was about to invade Czechoslovakia. . . . A statement to the French Ambassador sufficed to put an end to this lie. . . . This statement was repeated a second time. . . . But the Prague Government needed this lie as a pretext for their own monstrous work and terrorist oppression in influencing the elections."

As to this "lie" which Beneš is said to have "invented",

Hitler was of course simply juggling with words. Beneš maintains that whether mobilized or not, the German troops were certainly there and ready to march in. If, as was apparently the case in September, Hitler prefers the word "manœuvres" to mobilization to describe his actions in May, it does not make any real difference to the facts. These were firstly that in May, and on a still greater scale in September, there was a camouflaged concentration of German troops around the borders of Czechoslovakia ready to move on the word "go"; and, secondly, that having thus prepared almost the whole German army for an attack on Czechoslovakia, he still maintained, in September as in May, that it was a lie that Germany had mobilized.

Hitler, in his speech at Nuremberg, went on to explain that "in the interests of peace" he at once decided on the "most gigantic efforts of all time", namely the complete fortification of Germany's western frontier. It goes almost without saying that he can have had no other reason for these "gigantic efforts" than to prevent France and Britain coming to Czechoslovakia's aid. "You will understand", he said, "that a Great Power cannot suddenly submit a second time to such a base attack [*sic*]. In consequence I took the necessary precautions. I am a National Socialist, and as such am parrying every attack. . . . I took very serious measures on May 28th: (1) The strengthening of the Army and the Air Force was, on my order, considerably increased forthwith and immediately carried out; (2) I ordered the immediate extension of our fortifications in the west. . . . The most gigantic fortifications that ever existed are under con-

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struction there. . . . There are working now 278,000 of Dr. Todt's army (Dr. Todt was the Inspector-General of Roads) and in addition 84,000 workmen and 100,000 men of the Labour Service as well as numerous engineers and infantry battalions. The railways are taking to these districts daily 8,000 trucks of material. . . . Before the beginning of winter, Germany's fortifications in the west will be finished."

The Nuremberg speech preceded annexation of the Sudetenlands and Hitler therefore could not tell the whole story. He was more explicit in his speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, after the Munich annexation had been completed. Having admitted that in January 1938 he had finally resolved to "gain the right of self-determination for the 6,500,000 Germans in Austria", and repeated his declaration that the story of German mobilization on May 21st was "a lie", the main responsibility for which rested with Dr. Beneš, he went on as follows: "On the grounds of this intolerable provocation [*sic*] which was strengthened by an infamous persecution and terrorization of our Germans there (in Czechoslovakia), I decided to solve the Sudeten question finally and radically." Six weeks after this admission, he "finally and radically" solved the Czech question in the same high-handed way.

Hitler assured the National Socialist rally at Nuremberg that when the allegations of troop movements were made in May: "Firstly, not a single German soldier more was called up at that time, and secondly not a regiment marched to the frontier. . . . There was not one soldier who was not in his peace-time garrison. . . . In spite

of this, this base campaign took place in which the whole of Europe was mobilized with the object of holding elections under military pressure, brow-beating the citizens, and thus depriving them of their right to vote."

Brow-beating is a word which comes with peculiar grace from the German Führer who, of course, has never done such a thing in his life. Actually if Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government had really indulged in brow-beating, it is to be presumed they would have had more success than was shown in the fact that the poll of the Sudeten Party averaged between 85 per cent and 90 per cent of the votes cast in the German towns. At Gablonz it was actually 97 per cent.

The statement that "the whole of Europe" was mobilized in May is equally fantastic. The mobilization was confined to Czechoslovakia, and it is demonstrably clear that it had a negligible effect on the municipal elections. The number of men actually summoned to the colours in Czechoslovakia at this time was no more than 160,000.

It is further to be noted that the allegation of troop movements in Germany was also denied at the time of the annexation of Austria, but soon turned out to have been true. There was therefore considerable justification for not ignoring the reports in May, whatever the German Government may have told the French Ambassador. The British Government was among those that did not ignore them and Sir Neville Henderson, Ambassador in Berlin, was instructed on May 21st to make inquiries. He, like the French Ambassador, received a flat denial. That Sir Neville Henderson himself was not convinced is the only reasonable explanation of the advice that went out to

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British residents in Berlin at this period—to send their womenfolk and children home to England as soon as possible. Although it has been denied that any such advice was ever given, I have had incontrovertible evidence that British residents in Berlin acted upon the assumption that the Embassy had at any rate dropped a strong hint.

Beneš, in July 1938—three months before Munich—told me that he regarded the events of May 21st as “a turning-point in history”. He was tragically right, though not at all in the sense he meant. Beneš thought of them as having turned Hitler from his purpose because it had been made clear that an attack on Czechoslovakia meant war with the two Western democracies and he did not dare to face such a combination.

Far from this being the case, May 21st stimulated Hitler to secure his western frontier against an attack by France and Britain before seeking his final and radical solution of the Sudeten issue. He was careful, however, not to let fall any hint of this at the time. Instead he played the cat-and-mouse game, allowing the intended victim and the world to think that he was still ready to see the Sudeten dispute settled within the existing frontiers of Czechoslovakia. He even concurred in the British Government's plan to send Lord Runciman as unofficial mediator between the Sudeten minority and the Czechoslovak majority, though if what Hitler said on January 30, 1939, is correct, he had no intention whatever of allowing the Runciman mission to succeed.

The dispatch of the Runciman mission was announced on July 25th. It was immediately followed by a statement

to the British Press by Henlein in which he said that he did not ask for annexation to the German Reich and denied that he and his followers were opposed to the Czech State. They were only opposed, he said, "to the oppression of the existing régime. We naturally object to being treated like Africans, subject to alien overseers"—a description of the situation which applied with far greater truth to the way the Sudeten Party treated its opponents (German as well as Czech) than the other way round. A more apposite comment on Hitler's subsequent annexation of Bohemia-Moravia it would be difficult to find.

I had a long talk with Beneš in Prague two or three days after the news that Lord Runciman was coming was officially announced. I asked him whether he was not running a great risk in sanctioning the mission because if Lord Runciman were to take the view that the Sudetenlands should be ceded to Germany, Czechoslovakia would undoubtedly have to submit to dismemberment since England would never take up arms if the mediator found the case against Czechoslovakia proved. Beneš replied characteristically: "Our cause is just. I have no fear."

It was about this time that Beneš decided to resume the actual conduct of foreign affairs which he had relinquished when he became President. In the period immediately following the alarms and excursions of May this had not seemed necessary. German diplomacy had apparently received a definite check and the war-clouds had supposedly receded. Indeed, the feeling of confidence throughout Czechoslovakia at this time was most marked. It was especially noticeable during the Sokol Festival in

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June and July when Prague was filled with vast throngs consisting not only of the 200,000 Czechs and Slovaks who had come to take part in the gymnastic exercises but of friends and sympathizers from all over the Slav world, with the notable exception of Poland. There were some 20,000 Yugoslavs and, much more remarkable, 2,000 Bulgarians as well as representatives of Czech colonies in practically every country of Europe and North America. Rumania and Yugoslavia both sent detachments of their regular forces in order to stress the unity of the members of the Little Entente.

That Sokol Festival marks the culminating point, so far, of Beneš's life. It brought him the popularity and acclamation which had perhaps lacked something in spontaneity in the preceding part of his presidential term, due to the fact that his messages to his people were too formal, too complicated, and too cold especially to a nation which had grown used to the simple picturesqueness of President Masaryk. But at the Sokol Festival the crowds rose at him day after day. He symbolized the passing of the shadow of invasion and the rallying of distant friends. During the march past of 100,000 Sokolists and pilgrims in national costume with which the Festival terminated, I asked a Czech girl, who was sitting next to me and who was alternately weeping quietly and shouting herself hoarse, what it was that moved her so. She thought a moment and then said: "I believe it is to see so many friends when we have just passed through so great danger". Some ten yards from where we were sitting, Beneš was taking the salute with his usual calm friendliness and a characteristic wave of his right hand

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in which he held a pair of grey gloves. His face, as usual, showed nothing. But it did not need second sight to know what he was thinking.

That procession was on July 6th, just under three months before Beneš slipped quietly away by air to London, President no longer. As his plane left the ground the young hotheads of Prague were busy removing all traces of him from the capital, tearing up photographs of him, smashing busts not only of him but of President Masaryk, on the ground that it was the Masaryk-Beneš policy which had led to Munich, and so to the dismemberment, almost the enslavement, of their country. Six months afterwards, enslavement came too, and then not only the Czechs and Slovaks but the whole of Europe suddenly awakened, too late, to the realization that Beneš had been right all along.

Disillusionment began swiftly for Beneš and Czechoslovakia after Lord Runciman's arrival in Prague early in August. The number of serious incidents between Sudetens and Czechs began to increase, although the leaders of both groups had agreed to facilitate the task of mediation. According to the official organ of the German Foreign Office, the *Deutsche Diplomatisch-politische Korrespondenz*, however, mediation merely meant "to expose Czech subterfuges and to establish . . . the facts and conditions in their true character, in order, thereafter, perhaps to draw appropriate conclusions". In the circumstances, therefore, the increase in the number of incidents is comprehensible. Signor Gayda, in the *Gazeta del Popolo*, characteristically helped to queer Lord Runciman's pitch by suggesting that the mission was, at least

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in part, concerned with British plans for economic penetration in eastern Europe. Signor Gayda added that the dispute between Germany and Czechoslovakia would not be made any easier to solve by such economic interference.

By August 12th Hitler's preparations along the Rhine had reached the stage when he was ready to begin what he was pleased to call "manœuvres" on a scale never known before in peace time. Reservists to the number of 750,000 were called to the colours, in addition to the conscript classes already under arms and the battalions of workmen feverishly building the Siegfried Line. Two days later began the requisitioning of motor vehicles, the registration of doctors and nurses, and the cancellation of leave in various Government departments. At the same time restrictions were placed on members of foreign military, naval, and air forces travelling in Germany, and the area along the Franco-German frontier which foreigners were forbidden to enter was extended. While these developments were taking place the German Press received instructions to stress the essentially peaceful nature of the manœuvres and to express righteous indignation at the reports of troop movements as "unusual" which had appeared in many foreign newspapers, particularly in France. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, for example, ridiculed the "summer nervousness" of the foreign Press and spoke contemptuously of the sensationalism of "ill-intentioned French journalists". Coinciding with these dove-like utterances (which it is impossible not to regard as deliberately intended to mislead) came an article by Admiral Guse, head of the German Naval Operations

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Staff, published in *Die Wehrmacht*, organ of the German High Command, which contained the first indication that Germany intended to build up to the limit allowed under the Anglo-German Naval Agreements. Formal notice of this intention was only given in December, nearly three months after the Sudeten crisis was over.

All the summer the demands of the Sudeten leaders were gradually hardening on the ground that the behaviour of the Czechs left no alternative. Truly horrific tales of atrocity were laid at Beneš's and Czechoslovakia's door during this period. The mildest epithet applied to Beneš was that of "horse dealer". He was accused of relying on "Red hordes" and of emulating Schuschnigg in "setting up Marxists and Bolsheviks against the clear will of the people". Characteristic of the German Press comment of these days was the outburst of the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* on September 15th—the day Chamberlain arrived at Berchtesgaden. "Hussite hordes", said the *Lokalanzeiger*, "are throwing Czechoslovakia into an uproar. The Sudeten Germans are being hunted like wild beasts, the machine-guns are rattling, and it has become the sacred duty of Sudeten Germans to protect themselves with every means in their power, with flails and cudgels, with fists and barricades, for their lives and their homes are at stake." Henlein's appeal for help, the *Lokalanzeiger* went on, "leaps like a fire in our hearts".

Against this lurid piece of Goebbelese may be placed the statement of Lord Runciman in his letter to Chamberlain, published as part of the British White Paper, "Correspondence regarding Czechoslovakia": "I have been credibly informed that at the time of my leaving (Sep-

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tember 16th) the number of killed on both sides was not more than seventy." It is certain that more than half of these seventy were Czechs.

It is a curious coincidence, to put it mildly, that the Press campaign seemed to blaze forth more fiercely just when Chamberlain was meeting Hitler. The extracts given above appeared during the Berchtesgaden meeting. During the Godesberg discussions the *Völkischer Beobachter* published a cartoon of Beneš being grasped by a giant hand while another hand thrust before his eyes a paper bearing the legend: "Twenty years' oppression, starvation and murder of Sudeten Germans." The following day the same journal wrote of Czechoslovakia as being in a "blood bath", adding: "Bolshevism and its immorality are trump cards in this shattered State ruled by insane criminals."

Hitler himself was using much the same language. Writing to President Roosevelt on September 27th, Hitler said: "Innumerable dead, thousands of injured, tens of thousands of detained and imprisoned persons and deserted villages are the accusing witnesses before the world of the outbreak of a hostility already long apparent on the part of the Prague Government (hostility which you in your telegram rightly feared); to say nothing of the systematic destruction by the Czech Government during the past twenty years of German economic life in the Sudeten German regions which already showed every appearance of that collapse which you foresee as the consequence of an outbreak of war."

Either Lord Runciman was exceptionally gullible in estimating the fatalities at seventy, four days after the

Nuremberg speech of September 12th, in which Hitler made much the same allegations as in his letter to Roosevelt, or Hitler, who in his Berlin speech on September 26th branded Beneš in so many words as a liar, had already been guilty of misrepresenting the facts. Having decided on a "radical and final solution" of the Sudeten question in May, it was of course essential for Hitler to have some grievance, actual or manufactured, with which to inspire the enthusiasm of friends and divide the counsels of enemies.

From August onwards Beneš was busy day and night trying to find a solution which would leave Czechoslovakia's boundaries intact. He negotiated tirelessly with the Runciman Mission, with the diplomatic corps, with the Sudeten leaders, with the Czech-German Social Democrats, with the Czechoslovak Cabinet. Together with the latter, he produced first one plan, then two more, and finally on September 5th the so-called "Fourth Plan" which offered the Sudeten Germans full local government on a cantonal basis. "In my opinion", wrote Lord Runciman in his report to the Prime Minister on September 21st, "and, I believe, in the opinion of the more responsible Sudeten leaders, this plan embodied almost all the requirements of the Karlsbad Eight Points and with a little clarification and extension could have been made to cover them in their entirety. Negotiations should have at once been resumed on this favourable and hopeful basis; but little doubt remains in my mind that the very fact that they were so favourable operated against their chances with the more extreme members of the Sudeten German Party. It is my belief that the

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incident arising out of the visit of certain Sudeten German deputies to investigate into the case of persons arrested for arms smuggling at Moravská Ostrava was used in order to provide an excuse for the suspension, if not for the breaking off, of negotiations."

Though Lord Runciman did not actually say so, there is very little doubt that the inspiration for this intransigence came from Hitler.

The Fourth Plan was only published on September 10th and that evening Beneš broadcast an appeal to all parties and individuals in Czechoslovakia "who desired peace and order and who honoured in others feelings of human dignity and goodwill". The Czechoslovak Republic, he went on, had "for twenty years developed in peace and progress and the policy of democracy and freedom, of enrichment in the spheres of economics and civilization, of cultural advancement, religious tolerance, and social justice had been attained step by step, quietly and by evolution, without crises, without *putsches* or revolution". The only problem which had proved intractable, he went on, was the nationalities problem, "which for centuries had been a difficult one demanding ever new forms of solution".

Beneš declared that if certain "world events" had not supervened, efforts to settle the nationalities problem could have continued at "a healthy progressive tempo until the solution was reached". The Czechoslovak Government had been forced by these events to move more swiftly, but this did not mean that they would seek any method of solving the problem in any spirit other than one of "true, sincere democracy". "I place

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special emphasis", he said, "on the fact that nothing will be changed in the democratic structure and policy of the State."

From Hitler's point of view, of course, this insistence on democracy was sufficient to damn Beneš's Fourth Plan even if he had not already decided on a "radical and final" solution. Two days later, on September 12th, at the close of the Nuremberg rally of the Nazi Party, Hitler produced his first ultimatum to Beneš and Czech democracy. "We are confronted", he shouted in a voice shaking with passion, "by a united front from the Bolsheviks down to the Democrats. To-day we see international world democrats work hand in hand with Moscow. This insincerity is simply disgusting."

A year later, Hitler was working "hand in hand with Moscow" himself, but let that pass.

He went on: "It becomes unbearable for us when a great, German people, apparently defenceless, is delivered to shameless ill-treatment and exposed to threats. I am speaking of Czechoslovakia. This is a democratic State. It was founded on democratic lines by forcing other nationalities without asking them into a structure manufactured at Versailles. As good democrats they began to oppress and mishandle the majority of the inhabitants. . . . The conditions there are unbearable. Three and a half million people were robbed of their right to self-determination; economically they were deliberately ruined, and afterwards handed over to a slow process of extermination. The Czechs wanted to annihilate them. When 3,500,000 people who belong to a race of almost 80,000,000 are not allowed to sing any song the Czechs

do not like, or are brutally struck for wearing white stockings, and are maltreated for greeting one another with a form of salutation which is agreeable to them, this may be a matter of indifference to various representatives of the democracies, but I can only say that it is not a matter of indifference to us and I declare that if these tortured creatures cannot obtain rights and assistance by themselves they can obtain both from us."

At this point in Hitler's oration the air was rent for several minutes by frenzied shouts of "Sieg heil! Sieg heil!" ("Victory, hail!") The Fourth Plan and the Karlsbad Eight Points passed out of the picture from that moment. Henceforward, the Sudetens must have the right of self-determination—which, being interpreted, meant that whether they liked it or not (and they were never given an opportunity to choose), they must join Germany.

Hitler's call roused the Sudeten Party enthusiasts to such a pitch of passionate excitement that a friendly compromise with Prague was now quite out of question. Somebody had to climb down. Beneš is convinced that even at that late hour a firm stand by France and Britain, especially Britain, would have resulted in the climbing down being done by Hitler.

Such an attitude does not mean that the Fourth Plan was necessarily Beneš's last word. As we have seen, even at Versailles he was prepared for certain districts in northern and western Czechoslovakia to be ceded to Germany. It is true that the situation had become much more complicated since Versailles owing to the building of Czechoslovakia's vast system of frontier defences. But perhaps Beneš would still have been ready to see some

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of the western districts go to Germany provided the transfer was part of the general settlement he had all along been working for and provided that it gave Czechoslovakia a defensible frontier within which she would have been able to live an independent existence, economically as well as politically.

In the second week of May, as Beneš and Hitler both knew, Chamberlain had told a group of American journalists at a private luncheon arranged in London by Lord and Lady Astor that he thought the Czechoslovak State was an artificial creation which "could not survive in its present form", adding that "frontier revision might be advisable". I cannot say whether Beneš was aware too (though it appears almost certain that Hitler was), that at this same confidential luncheon the Prime Minister had expressed his conviction that neither France, Russia, nor Great Britain would fight for Czechoslovakia. But both France and Russia repudiated the suggestion and British official utterances had subsequently grown progressively more definite in declaring that Britain could not stand aside if France (in spite of Chamberlain's privately expressed opinion) honoured her pledge to go to Czechoslovakia's help. Unperturbed by the fact that the British Government had carefully refrained from a hard-and-fast commitment, Beneš still believed that French statesmen really did intend to stand by the Franco-Czechoslovak Alliance, not so much because the alliance was a bond as because the French could not, in his opinion, face the alternative, namely the complete breakdown of their system of checks and balances and the surrender of the hegemony of Europe to Germany.

He still calculated that if the French did come in, not only would Great Britain be forced to follow suit but that before long Poland would follow Britain's example in spite of the old trouble with Czechoslovakia over Teschen.

Meanwhile, at the very outset of hostilities, Russia, he thought, would immediately redress Czechoslovakia's great inferiority in the air by sending her vast and highly efficient air force to her assistance. Beneš did not consider that Italy had any intention of fighting, and he believed that he could count on Yugoslavia and Rumania at least to keep Hungary quiet if they did nothing else. He felt sure that Hitler would not dare to risk war against such a combination. He was convinced that if there were combined resistance to German pressure, the struggle would begin and end in the diplomatic sphere, and that though aeroplanes and troops might be pushed as pawns across the diplomatic chess-board, they would not be used. He felt further that even if this turned out to be a miscalculation, Germany was not in a position to wage a long and bitter struggle and would be rapidly forced to give in. To him, in fact, it was first and foremost a battle of nerves—indeed he said on one occasion that "the man with the best nerves would win".

Beneš reckoned without three things: Chamberlain's sincere and passionate loathing of war, France's reluctance to leave the comforting shelter of the Maginot Line, and the fact that Hitler, thanks to Ribbentrop's friends in London, was utterly certain that Britain would not fight. Ribbentrop held to this point of view—and carried Hitler with him—in spite of all the efforts of

the British Government to make him change his opinion. He turned out to be right, but only just. It is an interesting speculation what would have happened if Ribbentrop had been wrong, for there is little doubt that Hitler was quite sure that it was only a question of shaking the mailed fist, not of using it. Indeed, the chief difference between Hitler and Beneš on this point (and this point only) is that in Hitler's case the fist was his own and in Beneš's case somebody else's.

After Hitler's Nuremberg speech the course of events began to pass swiftly and irrevocably out of Beneš's control and into the hands of Chamberlain and Daladier. It had begun to do so when the Runciman Mission went to Praguc in August, though Beneš, at that time, still had confidence in France and Great Britain. The more involved France and Britain (especially Britain) became the more certain did it seem that Czechoslovakia would not have to face the savage music of the German guns. But as the crisis developed, things began to go wrong, and on September 6th, when *The Times* published a leading article along the lines of Chamberlain's confidential remarks at the Astor lunch, suggesting that Czechoslovakia should cede its alien fringe to its neighbours, it became evident that Beneš's hands were being forced from the steering wheel. Concessions, instead of coming from him, began to be offered by those whom he had counted among his friends but whose nerves, unlike his, were not proof against German menaces. Within three days from the time Hitler launched his self-determination demand at Nuremberg and threatened to march if the demand were not granted, Chamberlain had flown to

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see Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Within a week British and French statesmen in London agreed that "after recent events the point has now been reached where the further maintenance within the boundaries of the Czechoslovak State of the districts mainly inhabited by Sudeten Germans cannot, in fact, continue any longer without imperilling the interests of Czechoslovakia herself and European peace. In the light of these considerations, both Governments have been compelled to the conclusion that the maintenance of peace and the safety of Czechoslovakia's vital interests cannot effectively be assured unless these areas are now transferred to the Reich."

The area for transfer, it was added ominously, "would probably have to include areas with over 50 per cent of German inhabitants. . . . We are satisfied that the transfer of smaller areas based on a higher percentage would not meet the case."

Official documents so far published on the Sudeten crisis do not mention that any suggestion to "transfer . . . smaller areas" had been put forward since the French General, Lerond, had put forward to the Peace Conference at Versailles, with Beneš's approval, his plan¹ for the transfer of a number of Sudeten districts to Germany—a proposal which had been rejected by the official representatives of France, Great Britain, the United States, and Italy, although Germany would no doubt have jumped at it. But it is evident from the wording of the Anglo-French Plan that some less drastic proposal had been put forward during the Munich crisis,

¹ See page 140.

though by whom is not apparent. As at Versailles, however, France and Britain refused to listen. Instead they summarily ordered Beneš—not this time to keep something he was prepared to give up, but to surrender vast other areas in addition. And they insisted that the new boundary of his country should be fixed without regard to any considerations other than the nationality of the inhabitants. Economic, geographical, and strategical considerations were now brushed completely aside. It was not even proposed to arrange that some of the areas in which the proportion of Germans reached 50 per cent should be left inside Czechoslovakia in order to accommodate those Czech and Slovak minorities which were to be transferred to German sovereignty with the Sudeten majority and which (like the Sudetens themselves) did not want to remain under an alien rule. There was, in short, to be sauce, lots of it, for the Sudetens and for Germany, but none at all for the Czechs, Slovaks, and Czechoslovakia. Moreover, there was no provision whatever for the considerable number of Germans, Gentiles as well as Jews, who had for years co-operated on friendly terms with the Czechs and whose fate, if they were transferred to Nazi rule, would not bear thinking about.

Put yourself in Beneš's chair in his lovely room in the Hradchin Palace where, by a turn of his head, he could look across the peaceful panorama of Prague athwart the River Vltava in which those of the young folk of Prague who had not been called to the colours were disporting themselves. How would you have acted in the face of such a cruel dilemma? His friends on whom he had relied

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were urging him in the interests of peace to give up the frontiers they had solemnly promised to help keep inviolate twenty years previously. If he advised compliance he would be handing over hundreds of thousands of his own countrymen and an almost equal number of Germans who were on the side of democracy and racial equality to totalitarian and anti-Semitic demagogues who did not know what compromise and the rights of the individual mean. If he said that the sacrifices which were being demanded of him and his compatriots were so cruel, impossible, unjust that he would fight rather than accept them, he risked putting his little country into a war without allies against the most powerful military machine in the world.

In conjunction with the whole Czechoslovak Government, Beneš did his utmost to convince the French and British Cabinets that such a solution would be a disaster for Europe as well as for Czechoslovakia. Beneš tried to prove to them that far from settling anything, their plan would undermine the whole established order on which peace in Europe rested. His friends would not listen. Finally they fired at him, as their last parting shot, a definite and unmistakable indication that if he should resist he could in no case count on their support or military help.

Rightly or wrongly, Beneš and the Czechoslovak Government decided that they had no option but to submit to this Franco-British pressure. They took it for granted, however, that the surgical operation their country would have to undergo would at least be arranged decently and in order—that there would be negotiations

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and an international commission before which Czechs and Germans would both plead their cases.

They soon found that even this was to be denied them. Chamberlain, who at Berchtesgaden had already offered Hitler much at Czechoslovakia's expense, found when he went to Godesberg on September 22nd that Hitler's appetite had thriven on this generosity and that he was no longer asking merely for territory but for all the glory of a complete capitulation as from a beaten foe. Hitler's memorandum of September 23rd demanded "withdrawal of the whole Czech armed forces, the police, the gendarmerie, the customs officials, and the frontier guards from the area to be evacuated as designated on the attached map, this area to be handed over to Germany on October 1st."

The evacuated territory was to be surrendered exactly as it was, by which was meant, as Hitler carefully explained in an appendix, "without destroying or rendering unusable in any way military, commercial or traffic establishments (plants). These include the ground organization of the air service and all wireless stations. All commercial and traffic materials, especially the rolling-stock of the railway system in the designated areas are to be handed over undamaged. The same applies to all utility services (gasworks, power stations, etc.).

"Finally, no foodstuffs, goods, cattle, raw material, etc., are to be removed."

Although Hitler's Godesberg memorandum did allow that any plebiscite held in the areas that had been handed over should be carried out under the control of an

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"international Commission", the terms were too much for Chamberlain who afterwards told the House of Commons that he had made a strong verbal protest. In a letter to the Führer he declared that "there must surely be alternatives to your proposals which would not be open to the objections which I have pointed out". He added that "the Czech Government cannot, of course, be expected to withdraw their forces, nor can they be expected to withdraw the State police, so long as they are faced with the prospect of forcible invasion". He undertook, however, to put the German proposals before the Czechoslovak Government and request a reply at the earliest possible moment.

The Czechoslovak reply came on September 25th in a letter addressed to Lord Halifax. Though the signature is the signature of President Masaryk's son, Jan, who was then Czechoslovak Minister in London, there is reason to believe that the words are the words of Beneš. At any rate, the sentiments are his.

The document is worth quoting in full:

Sir (it ran), My Government has instructed me just now, in view of the fact that the French statesmen are not arriving in London to-day, to bring to His Majesty's Government's notice the following message without any delay:

The Czechslovak people have shown a unique discipline and self-restraint in the last few weeks regardless of the unbelievably coarse and vulgar campaign of the controlled German Press and radio against Czechoslovakia and its leaders, especially M. Beneš.

His Majesty's and the French Governments are very well aware that we agreed under the most severe pressure to the

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so-called Anglo-French plan for ceding parts of Czechoslovakia. We accepted this plan under extreme duress. We had not even time to make any representations about its many unworkable features. Nevertheless, we accepted it because we understood that it was the end of the demands to be made upon us, and because it followed from the Anglo-French pressure that these two Powers would accept responsibility for our reduced frontiers and would guarantee us their support in the event of our being feloniously attacked.

The vulgar German campaign continued.

While Mr. Chamberlain was at Godesberg the following message was received by my Government from His Majesty's and the French representatives at Prague:

"We have agreed with the French Government that the Czechoslovak Government be informed that the French and British Governments cannot continue to take the responsibility of advising them not to mobilize."

My new Government, headed by General Syrový, declared that they accept full responsibility for their predecessor's decision to accept the stern terms of the so-called Anglo-French plan.

Yesterday, after the return of Mr. Chamberlain from Godesberg, a new proposition was handed by His Majesty's Minister in Prague to my Government with the additional information that His Majesty's Government is acting solely as an intermediary and is neither advising nor pressing my Government in any way. M. Krofta (the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister), in receiving the plan from the hands of His Majesty's Minister in Prague, assured him that the Czechoslovak Government will study it in the same spirit in which they have co-operated with Great Britain and France hitherto.

My Government has now studied the document and the map. It is a *de facto* ultimatum of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation and not a proposition to a sovereign State

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which has shown the greatest possible readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe. Not the smallest trace of such readiness for sacrifices has as yet been manifested by Herr Hitler's Government. My Government is amazed at the contents of the memorandum. The proposals go far beyond what we agreed to in the so-called Anglo-French plan. They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defences, and admit the German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organize it on the new basis or make preparations for its defence. Our national and economic independence would automatically disappear with the acceptance of Herr Hitler's plan. The whole process of moving the population is to be reduced to panic flight on the part of those who will not accept the German Nazi régime. They have to leave their homes without even the right to take their personal belongings or, even in the case of peasants, their cow.

My Government wish me to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler's demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government. Against these new and cruel demands my Government feel bound to make their utmost resistance, and we shall do so, God helping. The nation of St. Wenceslas, John Hus, and Thomas Masaryk will not be a nation of slaves.

We rely upon the two great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial.

Prior to this, on the day that Chamberlain went to Godesberg, Beneš had broadcast a message to the Czech nation—a message which showed that in spite of the shocks of the Anglo-French Plan of September 21st he still believed that a general settlement of Europe's troubles would result from the crisis.

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"In the whole of Europe", he said, "changes are taking place, not only in our country. These changes have different forms in different countries. We must, therefore, face the changes with calm and unity. The Czechoslovak Government has had to act in accordance with the present circumstances.

"I have never feared, and I do not fear, for the future of our nation. I have made my plans and cannot be surprised by events. I am ready for any understanding that will be favourable for my country, for the pacification of Europe, and for collaboration with Great Britain, France, and Germany.

"Therefore I call upon you to preserve your calm and await developments without fear.

"We are prepared, if necessary, to fight to the last man for our rights, just as we are prepared to negotiate. If we have given way it is to our honour. I see things clearly and I have my plans. Our line of policy is firm. Your patriotic demonstrations I fully understand. They show your interest in the State. Do not lose your feeling of optimism and your common sense.

"Our adversaries expect trouble here and would take advantage of a situation of unrest. Therefore I repeat that it is essential to keep calm. Have no fear about the future of our Fatherland.

"A new Government has been formed and the names will be made known to you later this evening. It will be a Government of national solidarity. Let everyone return to his post. Do not listen to rumours and provocations. Have no fears for the nation and the State. The nation has deep roots, and I will close with the

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words of your national poet, 'Czechoslovakia will not perish'.

"I have a plan for all circumstances. I will not allow myself to be led astray. We desire an understanding on which we are to-day working, an understanding between the greatest nations of the world, and if this should be brought about and should this understanding be honourable our people would find great advantage therein, and there would be a general reconciliation of England and France with Germany and also a reconciliation of Germany and her neighbours and also collaboration with other States, especially in Eastern Europe.

"Let us save our strength. We shall need it. I repeat once more we shall need it. Let us preserve our mental equilibrium. To-day we need it more than ever before."

At such a moment of perplexity and stress the dignified restraint of Beneš's language both in the letter to Lord Halifax and his broadcast can only be described as magnificent, especially when it is remembered that throughout the whole period he was being subjected to a campaign of calumny and vilification in the German press and radio that is without precedent in history. Throughout the crisis, and since, Beneš has never once descended to personalities. The contrast between him and Hitler in this respect is strikingly illustrated by a comparison of Beneš's remarks quoted above with typical passages from the speech Hitler made at the Sports Palace at Berlin on the evening of September 26th shortly after the Chamberlain-Hitler meeting at Godesberg.

"The history of this problem is this", said Hitler. "In

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1918 Central Europe was torn to pieces under the motto 'self-determination of the people' and was remodelled by a few foolhardy or mad statesmen. Without paying consideration to history or to the origin of nations, to their national will, their economic necessities, Central Europe was atomized at that time and the so-called new nations were formed at will.

"The Czech State owed to this its existence. This Czech State began with one original lie. The name of the father of that lie was Beneš." (Cries of "Hang him!")

"Then Herr Beneš appeared at Versailles and gave the assurance that there existed a Czechoslovak nation. He had to invent this lie in order to give his insignificant number of compatriots a somewhat bigger and thus more justified volume; and the Anglo-Saxon statesmen who in matters of geography and race are not always so well informed did not consider it necessary to examine Herr Beneš's statement.

"Otherwise, they would have seen at once that there was no such thing as a Czechoslovak nation, but that there are Czechs and Slovaks and that the Slovaks do not want to have anything to do with the Czechs. So these Czechs finally, through Dr. Beneš, annexed Slovakia. As this State did not appear to be capable of life, they took without a second thought 3,500,000 Germans, in spite of their right to self-determination and their will to self-determination.

"As this was not enough, a million Hungarians must be added, then Carpathian Russians, and finally a few hundred thousand Poles. . . .

" . . . When Herr Beneš brought this State together

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with lies, he solemnly promised to divide the State according to the Swiss system of cantons, for among the democratic statesmen there were some who had qualms of conscience. We now know how Herr Beneš put into force this system of cantonization. He now began his system of terror. Even in those days the Germans tried to protest against this oppression and outrage. They were shot down, and since then a war of extermination has been carried on.

"In these years of Czechoslovak peaceful development well nigh 600,000 Germans had to leave Czechoslovakia for a very simple reason—because they otherwise would have had to perish from starvation. The whole development from 1918 to 1938 alone showed one thing quite clearly: Beneš was determined simply to exterminate solely the German element. He succeeded in doing this to a certain degree. He cast innumerable people into the deepest distress. He managed to make millions of people timid and cowed under the continual employment of terror. He slowly succeeded in closing up the mouths of millions. . . .

"Herr Beneš stood up and demanded from the Sudeten-Germans: *'When I make war on Germany, you have to shoot at the Germans. If you refuse to do it you are traitors, and I will have you shot.'*

"He demanded the same from the Hungarians, the Poles, and the Slovaks, whom he used for aims to which the Slovak people are indifferent.

"The Slovak people want peace and not an adventure, but Herr Beneš is able to make all these people either into traitors to the nation or traitors to their own

people. They must do one of two things: either they must betray their own people and be ready to shoot at them, or Herr Beneš says, 'You are traitors and must therefore be shot'.

"That is the greatest piece of shamefulness that is thinkable. To force alien men in certain circumstances to shoot their own compatriots, just because a rotten, decaying and criminal State régime insists on such action. . . .

"What has that man (Beneš) not promised during his life! And he has held to nothing. And now for the first time he is to keep to something. Herr Beneš says: 'We cannot leave this area.' . . .

"That is over. I have now demanded that after twenty years Herr Beneš shall be forced to face the truth. He will have to hand over this area to us on October 1. Herr Beneš now places his hopes in the world. . . .

"He still thinks he can evade a fulfilment of his duty. I can only say, two men face each other—there is Herr Beneš and here am I—and we are two different people. When Herr Beneš was scrimshanking through the great struggle of the peoples, I was doing my duty as a decent soldier. And to-day, once more, I stand before this man as a soldier of my people."

It only remains to add the comment of a distinguished American writer, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, who wrote of the Sports Palace speech in the issue of *Foreign Affairs* for January 1939, "The surge of voices as in a menagerie where all the animals have gone mad, but by some trick can still be made to bay and howl in unison, will not soon be forgotten by anyone who listened through to

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the end." Hitler, in fact, turned for his effects to human passions and emotions; Beneš made his appeal to logic and to the intellect.

Neither logic nor intellectual capacity availed Beneš much during the Sudeten crisis. From the day (September 19th) on which France and Great Britain sent him the Anglo-French plan with a virtual ultimatum to accept unconditionally or they would not be answerable for the consequences, Beneš never knew what fresh change the morrow would bring forth. When Chamberlain went to Godesberg and grew indignant with Hitler, it looked as though the pendulum was swinging back toward Prague. In the Godesberg memorandum Hitler raised the bidding above even the humiliating terms of the Anglo-French Plan which the Czechoslovaks accepted. This came to Chamberlain as "a profound shock". In his letter to the Führer on September 23rd he was no longer an advocate for the agreed proposals. He merely undertook to act as postman for proposals of which he disapproved. In a further letter on September 26th, still written "in my capacity as intermediary," Chamberlain informed Hitler that the Czechoslovak Government found the Godesberg terms "wholly unacceptable", adding that this "confirms me in the view I expressed to you in my letter and in our subsequent conversation". Chamberlain therefore urged Hitler "to agree that representatives of Germany shall meet representatives of the Czechoslovak Government to discuss immediately the situation by which we are confronted with a view to settling by agreement the way in which the territory is to be handed over". To this Hitler replied in conversa-

tion with the actual bearer of Chamberlain's appeal, Sir Horace Wilson, by a categorical "No". He followed this up on the same day with the speech in the Sports Palace from which extracts have already been quoted, and in which he once again insisted that he would march into the Sudetenlands on October 1st regardless of the consequences.

The next morning Chamberlain issued a statement which appeared to swing the pendulum a bit farther in Prague's direction. "It is evident", he said, "that the Chancellor has no faith that the (Czech) promises will be carried out. . . . We (that is, Great Britain and France) regard ourselves as morally responsible for seeing that they are carried out fairly and fully." He even undertook to see that this was done "provided that Germany will agree to a settlement of terms and conditions of transfer by discussion and not by force". It was a statement which naturally encouraged Beneš's innate optimism, for it implied that France and Britain had ceased even to be intermediaries and that they were preparing to stand firm on the vital question of discussion versus force. The Anglo-French plan of September 19th had merely invited the Czechoslovak Government to accept frontier revision in return for an international guarantee against unprovoked aggression. A week later the two Governments had accepted responsibility for enforcing the proposed dismemberment, but on the vital condition that Germany should abstain from force and agree to discuss ways and means. Thus the problem had really ceased to be a question of frontiers. It now rested where Beneš wanted it to rest—on the broader shoulders of

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international law. It was, in fact, the issue of the Kellogg Pact, the signatories of which promised not to use war as an instrument of national policy and thereby outlawed war except as an instrument to compel respect for international law and peaceful methods of settling disputes. That this was so, is implicit in Chamberlain's famous broadcast on September 27th when he said: "If I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted. Under such a domination, life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living."

Such a line of approach was sure of a sympathetic response from Beneš, however much he might feel that the Anglo-French plan went beyond rhyme and reason in dissecting his country. Indeed, on September 26th, when President Roosevelt issued his appeal to both sides, reminding them that they were bound by the Kellogg Pact and an arbitration treaty, Beneš immediately replied: "I believe that even to-day the dispute can be settled in a spirit of equity without resort to force."

Hitler's answer to Roosevelt, on the other hand, concluded with the words: "It now lies, not in the hands of the German Government, but in the hands of the Czechoslovak Government to decide whether there shall be peace or war." On September 28th, Roosevelt replied—this time significantly addressing himself to Hitler only: ". . . the two points I sought to emphasize were first that all matters of difference between the German Government and the Czech Government should be settled by pacific means; and, second, that the

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threatened alternative of the use of force on a scale likely to result in a general war is as unnecessary as it is unjustifiable. . . ."

Roosevelt added: "The present negotiations still stand open. They can be continued if you give the word."

Never before in history, perhaps, has there been such a clear issue between law and lawlessness; never such an opportunity to establish the rule of law in international affairs. And all the signs pointed to the opportunity being accepted. The French forces had already been mobilized since early September. The British fleet was mobilized on September 27th. The evacuation of the civil population of Paris and London had begun. Public opinion both in Great Britain and France was in fact prepared to face war—war not to preserve the boundaries of that "far away country" Czechoslovakia, of whose people "we know nothing", but to preserve the ideals of law and order and of the League of Nations of whose Covenant Great Britain and France as well as Czechoslovakia were signatories. Nor was this by any means all. Russia had assured Beneš it would honour its bond to help Czechoslovakia and Litvinov had repeated this assurance to Earl de la Warr at Geneva. Though Poland was officially silent, Warsaw had more than hinted that if Britain came in, the Poles were prepared to do so too, and on the same side—after a decent interval—on condition that Czechoslovakia gave them Teschen. Rumania and Yugoslavia were discreetly waiting, but their sympathies were unmistakably with Czechoslovakia. So were those of the United States as was clearly shown not only in President Roosevelt's correspondence with Beneš and Hitler but

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in the attitude both of Press and people. Even General Franco, on behalf of Nationalist Spain, had declared his intention to be neutral in spite of the help given him by Germany as well as Italy during the Civil War. In fact, apart from Hungary and Italy, whose position was doubtful, Germany stood alone.

In such circumstances, logic and intellect both told Beneš that the affair was after all working out along lines which could lead to an honourable, if exacting, settlement. What he did not realize was that both in London and Paris the men in power either failed to see, or failed to grasp, the significance of the hour. Quite properly Chamberlain did not slacken his efforts for peace although October 1st, which Hitler had named for zero hour, was only three days away. Through Mussolini, he persuaded Hitler to confer once more. News of Hitler's acquiescence reached Chamberlain on September 28th while he was recounting to a House of Commons surcharged with emotion the events which had brought Europe to the brink of war. There followed five minutes of what one of the members present, Harold Nicolson, afterwards described as "mass hysteria"—he was not far wrong, though he apologized to the House for the phrase a few days later.

When Chamberlain flew to Munich on September 29th he carried with him the memory of that scene in the House of Commons. Seemingly it obscured his recollection of that trenchant phrase in his broadcast: "If I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force." He no longer sought to induce Hitler "to agree that representatives of

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Germany should meet representatives of the Czechoslovak Government", as he had done in his letter to Hitler on September 26th. Instead, he, together with his French colleague, M. Daladier, and the two Dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, drafted terms for Czechoslovakia themselves and without allowing the Czechoslovak representatives to say a word. They then gave Beneš two hours to take them or leave them. Beneš's protests were disregarded and he was warned that if he did not accept, his ally France and France's associate, Great Britain, would stand aside and let Hitler do with Czechoslovakia as he pleased.

Mr. Seton Watson, who was one of the sponsors at the birth of Czechoslovakia, has described the final scene of her subsequent vivisection in his book, *Munich and the Dictators*, as follows: " . . . The hapless Czech delegates . . . after waiting till 10 p.m., were brought by the reluctant Mr. Gwatkin to Sir Horace Wilson's room and there, at Mr. Chamberlain's desire, shown a map on which the main lines of the new scheme were marked. Sir Horace informed them that he could not add further details or deal with their objections, and he then went back to the Conference, leaving the two Czechs with Mr. Gwatkin. In their full report there occurs the following passage: 'When he (Mr. Gwatkin) again began to speak of the difficulty of negotiations with Hitler, I told him that in reality all depended on the firmness of the Western Powers. Then Mr. Gwatkin replied in solemn tones: "If you do not accept that, you would have to settle your affairs quite alone with Germany. Perhaps the French will tell you more amiably, but believe me,

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they are of our opinion. . . . They are disinteresting themselves." ' "

"Finally, at 1.30 a.m., they [that is, the two Czechs] were introduced into the Conference, where Messrs. Chamberlain, Daladier, Wilson, Leger, and Gwatkin remained, the two Dictators having already withdrawn from the scene of their dictated victory. 'The French were visibly embarrassed and seemed to realize their loss of prestige.' But Mr. Chamberlain, 'who was constantly yawning, without the least sign of embarrassment', simply gave the declaration to M. Mastný to read aloud, and then listened impatiently to the various points raised by the Czechs. Neither he nor M. Leger were able to define the meaning of the phrase, 'preponderantly German character', but claimed that it was 'only the application of the plan already accepted' (the Anglo-French Plan of September 18th). Mr. Chamberlain told M. Mastný that the Czechoslovak member of the International Commission would have the same right of voting as the others. When asked whether the plebiscite areas would be occupied by international or British troops, the answer was that this was not yet settled, and that Italian and Belgian troops were being considered. When MM. Daladier and Leger were asked whether the plan laid before the delegates would be submitted to the Prague Government, the former, 'visibly embarrassed, did not reply', while the latter pointed out that the four statesmen had not much time, that they expected no reply from Prague, that they regarded the plan as accepted and that the Prague Government must send its delegate to the International Commission in Berlin by

5 p.m. on that very day at latest, and by Saturday at latest the officer who was to fix with the Germans the details of evacuation of the First Zone. *'It had been explained to us'*, added M. Masařík,¹ *'in a sufficiently brutal manner, and this by a Frenchman, that it was a matter of condemnation without appeal and without possible modification.'* "

Even when the natural grief and indignation of the two Czech diplomats has been fully discounted, the indisputable fact remains that the effect of what Chamberlain called the "Peace with Honour" which he brought back from Munich on September 30th was to give Hitler actually more Czechoslovak territory than he had asked for on September 23rd. The Munich terms entrusted an International Commission composed of representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Czechoslovakia with the task of delimiting "territory of predominantly German character" which was to be handed over to Germany in addition to the four zones which were roughly delimited at Munich. As it was quite clear that neither France nor Great Britain was going to stop Germany from taking what she wanted, this arrangement was tantamount to telling Germany to fix the new frontier where she liked. Munich further provided for a plebiscite in certain areas where the proportion of Germans was supposed to be uncertain. Actually, the plebiscite was never held and Czechoslovakia under pressure from Germany handed over certain additional districts in which the majority of the population was over-

¹ Pronounced Masarzhik. M. Masařík, who was an official of the Czechoslovak Foreign Office, should not be confused with M. Masaryk the Czechoslovak Minister in London.

whelmingly Czech. The upshot was that Czechoslovakia lost to Germany, in the sacred name of self-determination, over 800,000 Czechs, practically all its coal, and most of its iron. The electricity and water supplies of Prague were given to Germany. The country's two main railway lines were intersected at half a dozen places by German territory. Furthermore, Germany acquired a right to build one of her famous *autostrads* right across Czechoslovakia, linking Breslau and Vienna. This road was actually to be German territory. It is putting it mildly, in such circumstances, to say that Germany obtained a stranglehold on the whole conduct of Czechoslovak affairs. After Munich, it was farcical to regard Czechoslovakia as independent—so much so that Hitler's decision to end the farce six months later seems as unnecessary as it was flagrantly immoral.

When it became apparent that neither France nor Great Britain was going to stand by Czechoslovakia, Beneš immediately found himself attacked flank and rear by two other claimants for their respective pounds of Czechoslovak flesh. One, Hungary, had on ethnological grounds a strong claim to part of the territory she was claiming. But Hungary's demands were not (as Hitler's pretended to be) based on self-determination. They were frankly and openly a claim for the re-establishment of the old pre-war Hungarian frontier—that is to say, for the return of the whole of Slovakia and of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Beneš refused to entertain it for a moment. Ultimately, after he had bowed to the inevitable and resigned, the rival claims of Czechoslovakia and Hungary were "arbitrated" upon in Vienna by Germany and Italy,

although the Munich terms provided for the inclusion of France and Britain as co-arbitrators with the two "axis" Powers. The Duce, who sponsored Hungary's claim to the purely Slav districts of Slovakia and Ruthenia at Vienna, failed to move Hitler from settling the dispute on the strictly ethnological basis which he had conveniently disregarded whenever it ran counter to the demands he was making against Czechoslovakia. Hungary, which asked for her historic frontier, was given a mainly ethnographical one, though with more than 300,000 Slovaks included in it; Germany, which asked for an ethnographical frontier, took one which gave her three-quarters of a million Czechoslovaks, many of whom lived in districts where there were scarcely any Sudeten Germans at all. Hungary, however, got part of what she wanted later, when Germany annexed Bohemia and Moravia. By taking Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia and a fair-sized chunk of Slovakia by armed force when they were actually under German protection, Hungary earned the rare distinction of being the only country (to date) to have flouted Hitler and got away with it.

Poland, being stronger than Hungary, did not ask for an arbitral award, but followed Germany's example, merely sending Beneš an ultimatum employing the same arguments as Nazi Germany and demanding self-determination for the Polish minority in Teschen. While there was hope of French and British help, Beneš temporized, much to Poland's righteous indignation. In the end the same thing happened as with Germany; Poland marched in and took all she felt like taking. In addition to the 70,000 Poles in Teschen proper, Poland obtained

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over 134,000 Czechs and Slovaks and over 17,000 Germans. Incidentally, she helped herself to a very useful strategic railway junction, Bohumin, just in time to prevent the Germans from occupying it. The Bohumin region, so far as population goes, was and is incontestably Czech.

During the fortnight following Chamberlain's visit to Berchtesgaden on September 15th, when the initial move to dismember Czechoslovakia was made, Beneš scarcely closed his eyes. For days and nights on end he never went to bed at all, and when he did try to snatch a few moments' sleep, his rest was generally broken into by some fresh development of the crisis. The second Anglo-French ultimatum which followed the Chamberlain-Daladier meeting in London on September 19th reached him at 3 a.m. on September 21st when he was snatching two hours' sleep—the first time he had slept for three days. There followed a three-hour Cabinet meeting at 6 a.m., and it is doubtful whether he went to bed again until after the Munich decision was sent to him on September 30th. It is not surprising that the final catastrophe found him on the verge of physical collapse.

The world is perhaps in danger of forgetting that the Munich terms were never accepted by Beneš, nor by his Cabinet. Moreover, the Munich decisions, taken as they were by four men, not one of whom was a Czechoslovak, were never ratified by the Czechoslovak Parliament. According to the Czechoslovak Constitution, therefore, all that happened after September 21st was unconstitutional, illegal, and therefore null and void. Be that as it

may, on October 5th, as soon as was practicable after the terms of surrender had been imposed, Beneš resigned the Presidency. He felt there was no other course left to him if his now defenceless country was to escape still further vengeance at Hitler's hands. He vacated his post with the same angry cries assailing his ears as had greeted him when he first returned to Prague after having first settled the Teschen question with the Poles in Paris. On that occasion the rabble shouted because he had not asked enough territory to please their nationalistic fervour; now they shouted because they held him responsible for the fact that the Versailles policy appeared to have given Czechoslovakia too much and because it seemed that it was Beneš's policy of friendship with the Western States which had forced his country to capitulate to Hitler.

For a week or two, Beneš stayed in the quiet countryside of South Bohemia, too exhausted in body and sick at heart to try to think what he should do next. The acute strain had brought about the return of an old trouble which for a time affected the nerve of balance in his ears so that he was unable to stand or walk properly without assistance. But at the last poignant meeting of his Cabinet, and when he bade farewell to the chiefs of the political parties, he had not only announced his intention to resign the Presidency but had also said that he would leave the country lest he should make the hard task of the new Government in opening its negotiations with Hitler even more difficult. At first, however, he was too desperately in need of rest and sleep to carry out his promise. While he was in this state his nephew

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Bohus arrived from London to try to arrange for his uncle to leave. A few days later, on October 22nd, Bohus was able to bring the ex-President and his wife safely to England.

For days after his arrival at his nephew's house in Putney, Eduard Bencš did little but sleep. Then, as his health began to return, his old energy too began to reassert itself. He must, must find something to do. He had been active all his life and though after disliking work on the land he had grown to love gardening, he had no intention of emulating Cincinnatus and retiring to his farm till his country should need him once more. When, therefore, an invitation came to him to lecture at Chicago University, he decided to accept it. He threw himself into the work of preparing the lectures and speeches he was to deliver in America with the same indomitable energy and passion for exactitude that has always characterized him. All those around him were pressed into the service of looking up references and checking his facts, while he read, re-read, re-wrote, just as he had done when building up the case he was going to lay before some great international conference in the heyday of his diplomatic triumphs. While he was delivering those lectures, news of the complete destruction of his handiwork reached him. He read of Hitler in Hradchin Castle sitting in the seat that Masaryk and he had occupied. It was a bitter moment. But it was not the end. Be it noted first of all that neither in England nor in the United States has he ever uttered a word of recrimination or reproach against France or Britain or the statesmen who represented them. He has not even

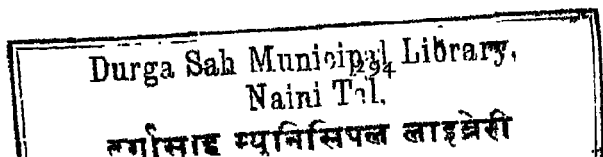
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reproached Hitler or Germany, though he has denounced the régime for which Hitler is responsible. When asked his opinion of the events of September 1938, he always replies simply that he is waiting—that the future will speak for itself and for him. In no public statement, in no published interview, and in no article he has written has he ever abandoned the restraint he imposed on himself from the very beginning about what happened during the September crisis. He is still waiting. . . .

But he has not been doing nothing. He at once set about organizing a new national movement—even what almost amounted to a new national Government, established like the one he helped to form during the World War, outside the confines of Czechoslovak national territory. He began to do this long before Hitler fulfilled all Beneš's prophecies and forebodings right up to the hilt by launching his attack on Poland in September 1939.

And now, who knows? Beneš himself faces the future with supreme confidence. He believes that dictators, like the lies of the old proverb Masaryk liked so much, have short legs, and that democracy and truth have very long ones. The dictator who defeated Beneš in September 1938 did so by lies. That is why Eduard Beneš still carries his head high and goes about the world smiling. He remembers—and is sure that, when the war which followed so quickly on the heels of Munich comes to an end, others will ultimately be forced to acknowledge—the motto of the first Czechoslovak State:

TRUTH PREVAILS.



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